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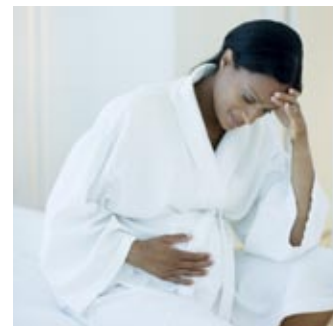
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160 Bullous pemphigoid and pemphigus vulgaris—incidence and mortality in the UK: population based cohort study

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RESEARCH PUBLISHED AHEAD OF PRINT

Relation of iron and red meat intake to blood pressure: cross sectional epidemiological study

BMJ, doi: 10.1136/bmj.a258

Ioanna Tzoulaki, Ian J Brown, Queenie Chan, Linda Van Horn, Hirotsugu Ueshima, Liancheng Zhao, Jeremiah Stamler, Paul Elliott, for the International Collaborative Research Group on Macro-/Micronutrients and Blood Pressure

A model based on age, sex, and morbidity to explain variation in UK general practice prescribing: cohort study

BMJ, doi: 10.1136/bmj.a238

Rumana Z Omar, Caoimhe O'Sullivan, Irene Petersen, Amir Islam, Azeem Majeed

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Published weekly. US periodicals class postage paid at Rahway, NJ. Postmaster: send address changes to BMJ, c/o Mercury Airfreight International Ltd Inc, 365 Blair Road, Avenel, NJ 07001, USA. \$796. Weekly
Printed by Precision Colour Printing Limited



MARC SEROTA/GETTY IMAGES

PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Transplant athletes and participants from the team of the state of New Mexico march wearing alien masks during the opening ceremony of the National Kidney Foundation US Transplant Games, held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The masks are an ironic reference to the purported 1947 UFO incident which made Roswell, New Mexico, world famous

THE WEEK IN NUMBERS

€90m Amount the European Commission is offering each year for fruit and vegetables in schools (News p 134)

\$50 Monthly payment to poor families in the Opportunity NYC project if they keep up health insurance (Feature p 142)

>72 hours Time intravenous catheters may be safely left in place if no contraindications are present (Research p 157)

10.4/100 000 Estimated incidence of ulcerative colitis in Western populations (Practice p 170)

200 Number of sex workers who marched in Phnom Penh to protest against human rights abuses (Review of the Week p 177)

THE WEEK IN QUOTES

“I believe that the government should admit publicly that health care is rationed” (News p 136)

“Self reported quantity and quality of sexual experiences among 70 year olds improved over a 30 year period” (Research p 151)

“For oestrogen receptor positive cancers, aromatase inhibitors are more effective than tamoxifen in postmenopausal women” (Clinical Review p 164)

“Despite Camembert, foie gras, and pain au chocolat, the French outlive the Spanish by a mean of seven months and the British by a full two years” (Outside the Box p 178)

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Conquering old age



FOTORESEARCH

Editorial, p 121
Research, p 151

“Old age,” said Confucius, “is a good and pleasant thing. It is true you are gently shouldered off the stage, but then you are given such a comfortable front stall as a spectator.” Nigel Hawkes invokes the ancient sage this week to question the decision of the UK’s General Medical Council to start charging an annual retention fee from doctors who are over 65 (p 145). The GMC may be helping to make old age less good for some, but since a key objective of modern medicine and public health is that more of us should reach old age, we should do all we can to make it as good as possible.

One pleasure that’s often assumed to dwindle with age is sex. But a study in this week’s journal reminds us that sex plays an important part in many older people’s lives. Indeed if the cohorts of 70 year olds reported by Nils Beckman and colleagues (p 151) can be generalised beyond Sweden (which some may doubt), the self reported quantity and quality of sex among older people has improved over the past 30 years. Yet doctors are often uncomfortable talking to their patients about sex, especially if the patients are elderly. As Peggy Kleinplatz says in her accompanying editorial (p 121), doctors should ask—and be trained to ask—every patient, regardless of age: “Any sexual concerns?”

A few years ago the *BMJ* asked its readers to vote on a list of non-diseases, defined as “a human process or problem that some have defined as a medical condition but where people may have better outcomes if the problem or process was not defined in that way.” Ageing came top of the list (www.bmj.com/cgi/content/

full/324/7334/DC1). This raises the intriguing idea that ageing can be separated from the increased susceptibility to disease that goes with it. So might delaying ageing be more profitable than tackling individual diseases? Two articles this week say that it might. Colin Farrelly recognises that some will think it is wrong to divert scarce public funding into tackling ageing (p 147), but he argues that, given the growing health burden of an ageing population, we can’t afford not to. Robert Butler and colleagues say the disease specific model of research has diminishing returns, and they call for substantially more research into mechanisms for extending healthy life (p 149).

In the meantime, what should medicine’s approach to elderly people be? In last week’s journal we published a Head to Head debate on whether geriatric medicine should remain a specialty (*BMJ* 2008;337:a515, *BMJ* 2008;337:a516). The subsequent poll on bmj.com came out strongly in favour (p 146). We don’t know how many of the votes were from geriatricians but two cases reported this week remind us of the complex realities of treating elderly people who are taking a pile of drugs for a range of diseases and perhaps non-diseases too (p 173). Finally, having started with the words of a Chinese sage, let me end with one of his 20th century compatriots, Qiu Fazu, who has died at what may one day be considered the ripe young age of 94 (p 180).

Fiona Godlee, editor, *BMJ*, fgodlee@bmj.com

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2008;337:a847

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WHAT’S NEW AT THE BMJ GROUP

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PLUS

Career Focus, jobs, and courses appear after p 180