



**A 59 year old woman with an ominous cough**  
**Try the picture quiz in**  
**ENDGAMES, p 1039**

Focusing on centralisation or regionalisation to address Canada's financially unsustainable healthcare system is like "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic", writes a retired family doctor in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2010;182:699, doi:10.1503/cmaj.110-2049). Exponential growth in three areas—new technology, new treatments, and the cost of drugs—has contributed to unsustainable healthcare expenditure, along with free, comprehensive health care. The writer thinks that patients should take more responsibility for healthier lifestyles, and more financial responsibility for health care—as a percentage of income above the poverty line.

Chewing gum may be an effective strategy for the management of salivary secretions in Parkinson's disease. The disease is associated with impairment of swallowing, which in turn can lead to drooling. A pilot study showed that chewing gum increased the frequency and decreased the latency of swallowing in patients with Parkinson's disease who had no substantial problems in swallowing while eating. The positive effects continued for longer than five minutes after the gum was spat out. (*Neurology* 2010;74:1198-202, doi:10.1212/wnl.0b013e3181d9002b).

Omega-3 fatty acids are thought to offer a number of health benefits; they have anti-inflammatory properties, as well as a role in brain and retinal development. Scientists have now identified four "new" lipids produced by the aspirin target COX-2 that act on two types of omega-3 fatty acids found in macrophages and have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties (*Nature Chemical Biology* 2010; doi:10.1038/nchembio.367). The properties of these signalling lipids, called EFOXs, are enhanced by aspirin through the activation of COX-2.

The American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA) has a classification of medical comorbidities that orthopaedic surgeons say could be used as a surrogate variable for the patient's general medical condition and a good predictor of perisurgical medical complications. A retrospective review of almost 200 cases of hip fracture surgery in older patients confirmed their hypothesis. ASA class was strongly associated with medical problems immediately after surgery; patients who were in ASA class 3 or 4 before surgery could be deemed at higher risk and should be managed closely (*Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery Am* 2010;92:807-13, doi:10.2106/JBJS.I.00571).



This 34 year old man presented with an injury caused by high pressure injection of paint into the left index finger. The iron oxide paint was visible on radiography, showing the "path of least resistance" taken along both neurovascular bundles. Although amputation was required at the distal interphalangeal joint, urgent decompression and meticulous debridement allowed the remaining part of the finger to be salvaged. Material injected under pressure may travel great distances from the injection site, resulting in arterial occlusion, necrosis, and potentially devastating consequences; urgent specialist referral for decompression is advised for all such injuries.

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A psychiatrist marked his mid-life crisis by shaving off his beard. It had been a part of his professional identity for so long that he became concerned about the effect his change of appearance might have on relationships with patients. His first patient of the day did indeed notice, but it was business as usual, leaving him feeling hugely relieved. He reflected with some embarrassment that it was not that he "looked like a psychiatrist" to this very depressed patient that mattered, but that he had tried to help her (*American Journal of Psychiatry* 2010;167:379-80, doi:10.1176/appi.ajp.2009.09101413).

An American retrospective cohort study of patients discharged after implantation of a drug eluting coronary stent reports that those who delay filling their first prescription for clopidogrel are putting their lives at risk. One in six patients delayed filling their prescription, with a median delay of three days within the group. Any delay at all was associated

with increased risk of heart attack or death (14% v 8% in those who filled their prescription on the day of discharge,  $P < 0.001$ ) showing that the transition between hospital and home provides an opportunity to improve care and outcomes (*Circulation Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes* 2010; published online April 20, doi:10.1161/circoutcomes.109.902031).

Change in the family setup disturbs white American teenagers more than it does their African-American peers (*Journal of Marriage and Family* 2010;72:234-53, doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00696.x). White adolescents who experienced family instability (such as parents separating) were more likely to become sexually active early and become parents outside marriage than their black counterparts. In turn, teenagers who engaged in delinquent behaviour or became unmarried parents were more likely to leave school earlier and struggle more in the workplace, and they were less likely to form stable relationships of their own. One explanation is that for black families, economic hardship may dampen the trauma caused by changes.

Communication practices are no different whether a primary care consultation is conducted on the telephone or face to face, says a qualitative study (*BJGP* 2010;60:341-7, doi:10.3399/bjgp10X501831). But telephone consultations tend to be shorter and are usually used by patients to deal with a limited range of single issue concerns, compared with the wide range of problems tackled in a face to face meeting. Silence plays more of a role in the consulting room than on the telephone, facilitating the introduction of additional topics—on the phone, doctors are likely to ask fewer questions.

Sexual intercourse may trigger carpal tunnel syndrome, suggests a writer in *Medical Hypotheses* (2010;74:950-2, doi:10.1016/j.mehy.2009.12.015). He proposes that bilateral carpal tunnel syndrome develops when the hands are repeatedly extended while under pressure from the weight of the upper body. In support of this theory, he identifies that the risk factors associated with non-occupational carpal tunnel syndrome—age, marital status, pregnancy, and use of hormonal agents—can be explained by changes in the frequency of having sex; and associations with obesity and large chest circumference could be explained by increased pressure imposed on the wrists during sex.

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