

EDITORIALS

- 103 Diabetic ketoacidosis at the onset of type 1 diabetes**
Is still common, despite the consistency of predictive factors worldwide, says Sasigarn A Bowden » *Research, p 137*
- 104 Vertebroplasty for vertebral fracture**
On the basis of current evidence, cannot be recommended as the first line treatment, says David J Wilson » *Research, p 139*
- 105 Safety of adjuvanted pandemic influenza A (H1N1) 2009 vaccines**
Risk of Guillain-Barré syndrome, if any, is smaller than for 1976 swine flu vaccines, say Frank DeStefano and colleagues » *Research, p 141*
- 106 How to improve surgical research**
A change in attitudes, training, and infrastructure, and much lobbying, are needed, says Peter McCulloch
- 107 The decline in heart transplantation in the UK**
Means that left ventricular assist devices should be considered for long term support in advanced heart failure, say Guy A MacGowan and colleagues

LETTERS

- 109 HIV testing; College of Medicine**
- 110 Mental illness treatments**
- 111 Risk illiteracy again**
- 112 Intraosseous access in infants; Wart treatments; Doctors and terrorists**

NEWS

- 113 Foundation trust status makes little difference to performance**
Ombudsman upholds eight in 10 complaints about the NHS
- 114 Capturing the art of hunger**
Primary care datasets will replace rumours about GP practices
CMOs advise on exercise levels for adults and children
Varenicline raises risk of heart problems, meta-analysis indicates
- 115 Romantic novels “negate” sexual health advice**
- 116 German doctor is fined €7000 for death of British patient**
EU needs “failsafe” system on unfit doctors
- 117 Novel polymer could be used in coronary artery bypass**
New European rules on food labelling will empower consumers
- 118 Antiparasite drug ivermectin cuts mosquito numbers by 80%**
Malnutrition soars in Horn of Africa as crisis worsens by the day
Hospitalisation rates explain differences in Medicaid costs across US
- 119 Germany relaxes law on preimplantation genetic diagnosis**

SHORT CUTS

- 120 What's new in the other general journals**

FEATURES

- 122 Thirsting for evidence**
Margaret McCartney examines the facts behind the claims that we all need to drink more water
- 124 From brand to bland**
Neutering the appeal of the once glamorous cigarette package has become a powerful weapon in tobacco control's arsenal, say Simon Chapman and Becky Freeman
- 126 Can we afford the NHS in future?**
If England keeps on spending on health at the current rate, the NHS will be unaffordable in 20 years' time, says the health secretary. Not necessarily, finds John Appleby

OBSERVATIONS

- BODY POLITIC**
- 128 Too much information** Nigel Hawkes
- NHS CHANGES**
- 129 A full blooded market system: at what cost to the NHS?** Ian Kirkpatrick, Christopher McCabe
- OUT OF HOURS**
- 130 How not to make an impression** Christopher Martyn
- PATIENT SAFETY**
- 131 Rethinking risks: space shuttles to chest drains** Tara Lamont

ANALYSIS

- 132 Norway's alternative plan to prevent cardiovascular disease**
Instead of European guidelines, it developed its own, with age differentiated risk thresholds, explain Ole Norheim and colleagues

RESEARCH

- 136 Research highlights: the pick of BMJ research papers this week**
- 137 Factors associated with the presence of diabetic ketoacidosis at diagnosis of diabetes in children and young adults: a systematic review**
Juliet A Usher-Smith, Matthew J Thompson, Stephen J Sharp, Fiona M Walter » *Editorial, p 103*
- 138 Glycaemic control in type 1 diabetes during real time continuous glucose monitoring compared with self monitoring of blood glucose: meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials using individual patient data**
John C Pickup, Suzanne C Freeman, Alex J Sutton
- 139 Effectiveness of vertebroplasty using individual patient data from two randomised placebo controlled trials: meta-analysis**
Margaret P Staples, David F Kallmes, Bryan A Comstock, Jeffrey G Jarvik, Richard H Osborne, Patrick J Heagerty, Rachele Buchbinder » *Editorial, p 104*



Feature, p 122



Vertebroplasty, pp 104, 139



Diabetic ketoacidosis, pp 103, 137



Cigarette packaging, p 124



EU food labelling rules, p 117

- 140 Performance of stroke risk scores in older people with atrial fibrillation not taking warfarin: comparative cohort study from BAFTA trial**
 F D R Hobbs, A K Roalfe, G Y H Lip, K Fletcher, D A Fitzmaurice, J Mant, on behalf of the Birmingham Atrial Fibrillation in the Aged (BAFTA) investigators and Midland Research Practices Consortium (MidReC) network
- 141 Guillain-Barré syndrome and adjuvanted pandemic influenza A (H1N1) 2009 vaccine: multinational case-control study in Europe**
 Jeanne Dieleman, Silvana Romio, Kari Johansen, Daniel Weibel, Jan Bonhoeffer, Miriam Sturkenboom, and the VAESCO-GBS Case-Control Study Group » *Editorial, p 105*

RESEARCH METHODS & REPORTING

- 142 Interpreting and reporting clinical trials with results of borderline significance**
 Allan Hackshaw, Amy Kirkwood

CLINICAL REVIEW

- 146 Contemporary management and recent advances in paediatric hydrocephalus**
 Jothy Kandasamy, Michael D Jenkinson, Conor L Mallucci

PRACTICE

RATIONAL TESTING

- 152 Diarrhoea after broad spectrum antimicrobials**
 Chris Settle, Kevin G Kerr

10-MINUTE CONSULTATION

- 154 Otitis media with effusion (“glue ear”)**
 Amir Farboud, Richard Skinner, Rohit Pratap

OBITUARIES

- 156 Peter Chong; Anthony James Clarke; George Keith Douglas; Bryan John Hockey; Edward Stuart Mucklow; Edward Huw Penry; Thomas James Wilmot**

VIEWS AND REVIEWS

PERSONAL VIEW

- 157 The killing of doctors in Iraq must stop**
 Nisreen A Alwan

REVIEW OF THE WEEK

- 158 Standing on Principles: Collected Essays** by Tom L Beauchamp and **Private Bodies, Public Texts** by Karla F C Holloway
 Julian Sheather

BETWEEN THE LINES

- 159 The physician’s progress** Theodore Dalrymple

MEDICAL CLASSICS

- 159 Father Damien: An Open Letter to the Reverend Dr Hyde of Honolulu** by Robert Louis Stevenson
 Barry Newport

COLUMNISTS

- 160 The scam of integrative medicine**
 Margaret McCartney
A tale of two hospitals Mary E Black

ENDGAMES

- 161 Quiz page for doctors in training**

MINERVA

- 162 Arsenic, and other stories**

FILLERS

- 155 Emergency in the cowshed**



A classic story of leprosy? p 159



Iraqi doctors fear for their lives, p 157

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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 Polestar Limited



ART LOSS REGISTER/PA

PICTURE OF THE WEEK

A statue of Peter Turner, a 17th century physician at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London, was returned to nearby St Olave's church last week. It had been removed after the church was bombed in 1941 during the London Blitz.

The statue is thought to date from 1641 and will undergo conservation work.

THE WEEK IN NUMBERS

-0.30% Overall mean difference in HbA_{1c} for continuous glucose monitoring versus self monitoring of blood glucose in people with type 1 diabetes
(Research, p 138)

6-10 weeks Usual duration of an episode of otitis media with effusion in children younger than 10 years
(Practice, p 154)

29.5 cases Annual incidence of community onset *Clostridium difficile* infection reported in one UK urban area per 100 000 population
(Practice, p 152)

1950s Decade in which management of hydrocephalus was revolutionised, with the development of shunts to divert cerebrospinal fluid away from the cranial cavity
(Clinical Review, p 146)

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“Authors could start their papers with a bang instead of a banality and continue in a way that shows that they want people to engage with what they have to say”

Christopher Martyn, associate editor, *BMJ*, on the impenetrability of researchers' reports (Observations, p 130)

QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Last week we asked, “Is there evidence that competition in healthcare is a good thing?”

73% voted no (total 377 votes cast)

This week's poll asks, “Are open data a good idea?”

See **OBSERVATIONS**, p 128

► **bmj.com** Cast your vote

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Don't just swallow, check the evidence first

All kinds of organisations recommend drinking eight glasses of water a day, including the NHS on its NHS Choices website. "This is not only nonsense, but is thoroughly debunked nonsense," says McCartney

Some of you will have seen an advertisement on *bmj.com* in recent weeks from Hydration for Health. It's a campaign, sponsored by the producers of Volvic, Evian, and Badoit bottled waters, to get us all to drink more water. What's this doing in a medical journal? The campaign website explains that encouraging "healthy hydration" should be part of routine patient counselling because "evidence is increasing that even mild dehydration plays a role in the development of various diseases."

But what and where is this evidence? Alerted to the ads by general practitioner and *BMJ* columnist Margaret McCartney, we discovered that we hadn't followed our own guidelines (<http://bit.ly/pSPdGk>). The advertisement bypassed our editorial checks, so we didn't ask the advertiser, Danone, to provide peer reviewed, published research articles in support of their statements. We've now done this.

It seems unlikely that Danone will be able to deliver what we need. In an article in this week's *BMJ*, McCartney picks through the references used to support the idea that we don't drink enough water (p 122). She finds them sadly lacking. Some refer to discussion papers rather than primary research, others to low level observational studies.

Yet Danone is not alone in saying we should drink more. All kinds of organisations recommend drinking eight glasses of water a day, including the NHS on its NHS Choices website. "This is not only nonsense, but is thoroughly debunked nonsense," says McCartney. Some patients may benefit from drinking more water—those with recurrent kidney stones and polycystic kidney disease for example. But she concludes that there is no clear evidence either for or against telling everyone to do so. And then there are all those bottles.

Contrast this evidence-lite approach with the rigorous, evidence based, consultative, and transparent methods of the Norwegian primary prevention guidelines group. Worried by the fact that European guidelines classified almost all older people as being at high risk of cardiovascular disease, Norway has developed its own guidelines that use differential risk thresholds according to age. In this week's *BMJ* the guideline's authors, Ole Norheim and colleagues, describe how they did this (p 132).

Instead of adopting existing algorithms for estimating risk, such as the QRISK or Framingham cardiovascular risk scores, which have not been validated in Norway, the guideline team developed their own using data from Norwegian patients. Whereas the European guidelines give a single threshold for starting medication—at an absolute risk of cardiovascular death $\geq 5\%$, the Norwegian guidelines give three different thresholds for patients aged up to 49, 59, and 69 years. This shifts the emphasis of treatment from older to younger people. "Compared with the European guidelines, the total sum of life gained is about the same, but the number of patients treated is considerably lower," they say.

This approach has to be better for Norwegians and their health system. What can other countries learn from it?

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

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2011;343:d4478

▶ Listen to Margaret McCartney discussing Hydration for Health in a podcast at <http://bit.ly/r4fMIC>

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Career Focus, jobs, and courses appear after p 160

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