The Gleason grading system for prostate cancer assigns a high score to patients with a poor prognosis, yet a substantial number of patients with low scores still develop aggressive cancers. A Swedish team used genetic microarray analysis to collate genetic signatures of a range of tumour characteristics, creating unique molecular profiles. Using these profiles, they identified five subtypes of prostate cancer on the basis of distinct prognostic outcomes. Two of these subtypes counted for 11% and 18% of patients with poor prognoses but low Gleason scores. The team says its work may help identify such patients at the time of diagnosis (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 2011, doi:10.1073/pnas.1117029108).

Short people appear to draw the short straw when it comes to receiving lung protective ventilation (LPV) to enhance survival for acute lung injuries. Researchers analysed the records of a US cohort of 421 patients with severe sepsis related lung injuries. Women received LPV less frequently than men, but after adjusting for height and the severity of illness, the researchers found no difference in exposure to LPV by sex. For some reason short people were less likely to receive LPV—explaining the tendency to adhere to LPV protocols less strictly in women (Critical Care 2011;15:R262, doi:10.1186/cc10524).

Should the failure of bone healing be put down to osteoporosis? The answer is no. After screening 1498 patients over the age of 50 with acute fractures for osteoporosis, 40 were treated for non-union. Those with atrophic non-union according to radiographic results were analysed separately and compared with matched patients. The presence of osteoporosis, osteopenia, and normal bone density did not differ significantly between the groups. The use of preoperative bone mineral density measurements in patients with non-union has no clinical value (J Bone Joint Surg Br 2011;93-B:1639-43, doi:10.1302/0301-620X.93B12.27001).

Incorporating the link between the severity of appendicitis on computed tomography (CT) scans and white blood cell counts and C reactive protein (CRP) levels, a Korean team identified that only changes in the appendix wall or abscess formation were significantly related to raised values for white cells and CRP. CT severity scores were more strongly correlated with CRP levels than white cell counts—suggesting CRP could be a useful predictor for perforated appendicitis. White cell counts are more useful to detect early acute appendicitis (British Journal of Radiology 2011;84:1115-20, doi:10.1259/bjr/47699219).

Do-it-yourself aural grommets are being produced in countries where budgets no longer stretch to buying them from the usual suppliers. Otolaryngologists in Myanmar (Burma) have created their own solution to economic restrictions. The ingredients they use are polythene tubing (1.5 mm diameter), a 21 gauge needle, and a cigarette lighter. Newly made grommets are threaded onto the needle and stored in a sterilising solution for future use. The average in situ lifespan is six to 10 months and local audit data indicate that the incidences of otorhoea and persistent perforation after grommet extrusion are 5% and 3%, respectively (Journal of Laryngology and Otology 2011;125:1268-9, doi:10.1017/S0022215111001964).

Great Britain is a “drunk and disorderly” country, according to a nationwide survey of alcohol use and misuse (Frontline Gastroenterology 2012;3:57-63, doi:10.1136/flgastro-2011-100047). Alcohol abuse is common across all socioeconomic strata and all geographical areas. Men are more likely than women to report binge drinking and drinking and driving, or to have missed work owing to alcohol consumption. Young drinkers say they are heavily influenced by price and alcohol promotions, and therefore targeting price is likely to have the greatest impact on public health, say the authors.

P G Wodehouse and George Bernard Shaw were prolific authors who both continued writing well into old age. Researchers examined the effect of age on linguistic markers in works by both authors using a measure of language called the MCU—mean clauses per utterance (sentence). The MCU revealed no decline in language production with age for either writer. Both enjoyed good health, providing support for the adage “use it or lose it” for written language production (Journal of American Geriatric Society 2011;59:1567-8, doi:10.1111/j.1532-5415.2011.03531.x).

Despite improvements in mental health services and public healthcare in the Nordic countries over the past 20 years, the life expectancy gap between those with serious mental illness and those without remains unchanged. Mentally ill men die 20 years earlier than those without mental illness (British Journal of Psychiatry 2011;199:453-8, doi:10.1192/bjp.bp.110.085100). The gap closed somewhat during the era of de-institutionalisation but remains more pronounced in men than women, especially in Sweden. The researchers blame the culture of not taking physical health seriously when treating psychiatric patients.

Is there a relation between chronic kidney disease and cognitive decline? Despite a population based cohort of nearly 8000 older adults followed up for seven years, no increased risk of cognitive decline was identified in those with a low estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) at baseline. But what the researchers did find was that a fast decline in eGFR was associated with global cognitive decline and incident vascular dementia—suggesting that the association between the two is probably mediated by vascular mechanisms (Neurology 2011;77:2043-51, doi:10.1212/wnl.0b013e31823b4765).