

Pens and pencils are often thrown by children and can cause penetrating eye injuries. A review in *Clinical Ophthalmology* says 748 ocular pen injuries and 892 ocular pencil injuries were reported in the UK between 2000 and 2002 in the Home and Leisure Accident Surveillance System (2012;6:41-4, doi:10.2147/OPH.S28342). But no eye injuries from swords (including toys) or fencing foils were reported, leading the authors to conclude that with regard to eyes, pens are still mightier than swords.

The Slumdoctor Project is looking for doctors and nurses to join a team of healthcare professionals setting up a clinic in a poverty stricken part of India in March (23-25). The makeshift camp will be based in a school in a small village in the Punjab. In March 2011 8000 patients were seen by a team of 30. Thousands of patients travelled on foot for up to 100 km to get there. The camps have been running for seven years and have doubled in size every year. For more information or to volunteer go to www.slumdoctor.co.uk or email slumdoctor@hotmail.co.uk.

Five hundred healthy, young adult twins and their siblings participated in a study of iron, transferrin (the protein that transports iron), and brain structure, which confirms that iron has a role in healthy brain development. Nine years after initial measurement of blood transferrin, brain volume and integrity of structure were assessed with two types of magnetic resonance imaging. Researchers found that people with raised concentrations of transferrin (often associated with prolonged iron deficiency) had structural changes in brain regions vulnerable to neurodegeneration, and twin genetic analysis showed that a common set of genes affects both transferrin levels and brain structure (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 2012, doi:10.1073/pnas.1105543109).

Germany is one of four countries with a mandatory long term care insurance system. But as birth rates fall and people live longer, less money is available for the increasing numbers who need it. Last year Germany passed a new law that helps relatives care for their elderly dependants. People can work half time and continue to be paid 75% of their salary until the period of care is over. To avoid gaming, they are then obliged to return to full time work, again with 75% salary, until the caring period is balanced (*Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 2012;90:6-7, doi:10.2471/BLT.12.020112).

An 83 year old former smoker presented with a one month history of pruritis and erythroderma of the trunk and limbs that had not settled when treated as eczema with emollients and topical steroids. Examination showed a coalescing macular erythema of body and limbs with blueish periorbital oedema. Dermatomyositis of paraneoplastic origin was suspected. His creatinine kinase level was 442 U/L (normal range 39-308). Within 24 hours he developed dysphagia. Oral gastro-duodenoscopy showed a 10 cm lesion in the mid-oesophagus. Histology confirmed well differentiated oesophageal adenocarcinoma. Prednisolone and palliative chemotherapy were given, but the patient died six weeks later.

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A “no-sedation” protocol reduces the time for which patients receive mechanical ventilation, and reduces time spent in intensive care and in hospital generally. But does this protocol leave patients more likely to have adverse psychological outcomes? A single blinded cohort study of 140 patients requiring mechanical ventilation reports that those undergoing ventilation without sedation were no more likely to have psychological sequelae after intensive care than those who’d undergone standard treatment with sedation (*Critical Care* 2011;15:R293, doi:10.1186/cc10586).

Gastric acid is a major defence against infections. Italian researchers investigated whether the increasing use of ranitidine as an off-label inhibitor of gastric acid secretion in vulnerable newborns is creating problems. They focused on very low birthweight babies admitted to neonatal intensive care units with a gestational age of 24-32 weeks. Exposure to ranitidine in these babies was significantly linked to greater risks of infection, necrotising enterocolitis, and death (*Pediatrics* 2012;129:e40-5, doi:10.1542.peds.2011-0796).

Rewarding children for healthy eating is controversial, but offering incentives alongside gradual exposure to tastes has been shown to increase intake and food liking in research settings. Moving this approach into the home, with parents offering stickers for tasting a chosen vegetable over three weeks, worked well. Compared with children



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in the control group whose parents had no specific instructions, tangible rewards with repeated exposure resulted in improved food intake and liking, and these outcomes were maintained at three months. Offering praise and exposure was no better than no specific intervention (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 2012;95:72-7, doi:10.3945/ajcn.111.024596).

Early use of statins during hospital admission for ischaemic stroke is strongly associated with improved survival—whether patients were already taking the drugs before the stroke or newly started on them in hospital. Stroke patients who withdraw from statins in hospital even for a brief period have a significantly reduced survival rate post-stroke. The higher the dose of statin the better the survival rate. Animal models have previously shown that statins reduce infarct size (*Stroke* 2012;43:147-54, doi:10.1161/strokeaha.111.627729).

Localised cryotherapy treatment for prostate cancer is increasing, while the use of brachytherapy (localised radiotherapy) is generally stable. But a US based study concludes that although cryotherapy is cheaper, it is associated with significantly more urinary and erectile dysfunction and a greater need for salvage androgen deprivation therapy, suggesting poorer cancer control. Brachytherapy is associated with more bowel complications (*BJU International* 2011; doi:10.1111/j.1464-410x.2011.10775.x).
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