



- ESSAY, p 16
- FEATURE, p 20
- HEAD TO HEAD, p 22

NEWS

- 1 Parents should not be forced to tell donor conceived children of their origins
Monitor puts censured Mid Staffordshire hospital trust into administration
- 2 Children's heart surgery unit at Leeds and two other centres were close to "alert" threshold
Roll-out of 111 telephone hotline causes hospitals severe problems
- 3 Personalised care in type 2 diabetes reduces complications, study finds
Wales sets up drop-in vaccination clinics to bring measles outbreak under control
- 4 Doctors should defend the wishes of patients on the organ donor register
Coroner finds failings in care of woman who died after being refused an abortion
- 5 Cardiff dean is exonerated after claims that his team manipulated images in research papers
High heart rate is risk factor for death, not just a sign of poor fitness
- 6 Nestlé will give nutritional advice to women in anti-hunger campaign
NHS needs to assess risks of splitting its budget between several agencies
Big business is risk to health, say medical colleges



Roger Boyle (left) sent incomplete data on heart surgery, p 2

RESEARCH

RESEARCH NEWS

- 11 All you need to read in the other general journals
- RESEARCH PAPERS
- 12 Coronary artery calcium score prediction of all cause mortality and cardiovascular events in people with type 2 diabetes: systematic review and meta-analysis
Caroline K Kramer et al
 - 13 Effect of behavioural-educational intervention on sleep for primiparous women and their infants in early postpartum: multisite randomised controlled trial
Robyn Stremmler et al
● EDITORIAL, p 8
 - 14 Effect of routine controlled cord traction as part of the active management of the third stage of labour on postpartum haemorrhage: multicentre randomised controlled trial (TRACOR)
Catherine Deneux-Tharoux et al
 - 15 One year outcomes in patients with acute lung injury randomised to initial trophic or full enteral feeding: prospective follow-up of EDEN randomised trial
Dale M Needham et al

COMMENT

EDITORIALS

- 7 Welcoming rotavirus vaccine to the UK immunisation schedule
Miren Iturriza-Gómara and Nigel Cunliffe
- 8 Supporting parents who are worried about their newborn's sleep
Helen L Ball
● RESEARCH, p 13
- 9 Mid Staffordshire should lead to a fundamental rethink of government policy
Allyson M Pollock and David Price
- 10 Publishing your research study in the *BMJ*
José G Merino



Coping with babies' sleep, p 8

ESSAY

- 16 The science of obesity: what do we really know about what makes us fat?
The history of obesity research is a history of two competing hypotheses. Gary Taubes argues that the wrong hypothesis won out and that it is this hypothesis, along with substandard science, that has exacerbated the obesity crisis and the related chronic diseases. If we are to make any progress, he says, we have to look again at what really makes us fat

FEATURES

- 20 The no candy man
The US endocrinologist Robert Lustig is on a crusade against sugar. He talks to Balaji Ravichandran about why he believes we are getting fatter and how he hopes to start tackling the sugar industry



The campaigner against the "toxin" that is sugar, p 20

HEAD TO HEAD

- 22 Can we leave industry to lead efforts to improve population health?
Derek Yach argues that business is motivated to tackle public health problems such as the obesity epidemic, but, ultimately, says Klim McPherson, companies are interested in their shareholders

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Obituary: Peter Beales, p 29

COMMENT

LETTERS

- 24 New somatic symptom disorder in DSM-5
- 25 Boldt: the great pretender;
cancer of the penis;
Misuse of prescription drugs;
Hormonal contraception and thrombosis
- 26 Healthcare in immigration removal centres

OBSERVATIONS

BACK TO THE
FUTURE

- 27 Memories of
Thatcher
Richard Smith

PERSONAL
VIEW

- 28 I'm a patient: show
me the trial data
Alex Lomas



OBITUARIES

- 29 Peter Beales
Fighter of malaria and other tropical diseases
- 30 Shahid Zamiruddin Ahmed;
Charles John Henry Bland; Jeremy Davies;
Mary Nicol Finlay; William C M Lawrence; Ruth
Porter; John Sutton Pippard

LAST WORDS

- 41 Thatcher's legacy Des Spence
The messianic cockroaches of sexual health
Mary E Black

EDUCATION

CLINICAL REVIEW

- 31 Pulmonary hypertension: diagnosis and
management
David G Kiely et al

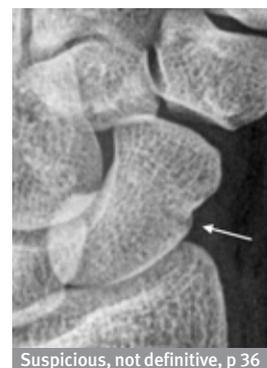
PRACTICE

RATIONAL IMAGING

- 36 Investigating
suspected scaphoid
fracture
Randall L Baldassarre
and Tudor H Hughes

EASILY MISSED?

- 38 Delirium in older
adults
Edison I O Vidal et al



ENDGAMES

- 40 Quiz page for doctors in training

MINERVA

- 42 Baize doors, and other stories

Returning from a break?

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20 April 2013 Vol 346

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**PICTURE OF THE WEEK**

A wedge-shaped container designed to carry an anti-diarrhoea kit to poor and remote areas by slotting in between bottles in Coca-Cola crates has won a prestigious design award. Kit Yamoyo was designed for ColaLife, a non-profit making organisation that piggy backs on Coca-Cola's distribution system to deliver lifesaving products to developing countries. The kit scooped a Designs of the Year award, run by the Design Museum, London, where winning entries are on show until July (www.designmuseum.org) "How can it be right that Coca-Cola reaches remote rural villages in Africa yet simple lifesaving medicines don't?", said the designer, Simon Berry.

RESPONSE OF THE WEEK

Having graduated in 1958, I had the opportunity to witness the, admittedly rare, but horrifying effects of measles encephalitis, in utero rubella, and chickenpox meningitis, not to mention the devastation of polio epidemics.

The fact that these conditions have all but disappeared in developed countries, render it easy to demonise vaccination.

Joseph E More, retired psychiatrist, in response to "Study finds no association between autism and vaccination" (*BMJ* 2013;346:f2095)

BMJ.COM POLL

Last week's poll asked: "Should drug companies publish the names of doctors to whom they make donations?"

89% voted yes (total 438 votes cast)

► *BMJ* 2012;346:f2201

This week's poll asks:

"Can we leave industry to lead efforts to improve population health?"

Head to Head:

Yes ► *BMJ* 2013;346:f2270

No ► *BMJ* 2013;346:f2426

► **Vote now on bmj.com**

MOST SHARED

Doctor who lied on his CV is allowed to return to work

Effect of behavioural-educational intervention on sleep for primiparous women and their infants in early postpartum: multisite randomised controlled trial

Cost effectiveness of telehealth for patients with long term conditions (Whole Systems Demonstrator telehealth questionnaire study): nested economic evaluation in a pragmatic, cluster randomised controlled trial

Sleepwalking into the market

Vitamin D sufficiency in pregnancy (185 views)

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Food, inglorious food

Are we headed for a world where the individual is left free to choose his or her poison?

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Sex and death obsessed our immediate forebears, yet now we hardly turn a hair at their mention. Food, however, is another matter. So much about the subject is controversial.

Even one of the simplest questions—what makes us fat—is hotly contested. This week we provide space for two critics of the theory that obesity is an energy balance disorder: Gary Taubes (p 16) and Robert Lustig (p 20). They argue that the insulin releasing properties of sugars such as sucrose and high fructose corn syrup are to blame.

Step outside the hallowed halls of biochemistry and things really heat up. Since the UN summit 18 months ago, we know that almost two thirds of global deaths result from non-communicable diseases and that unhealthy diet has an important role in these. But what to do about it: cajole individuals to change their diets or get governments to use legislation, regulation, and taxation to propel their populations towards the healthy option?

In a Head to Head this week (p 22) we ask whether we can leave industry to lead efforts to improve population health, the option currently being pursued in the UK with its responsibility deals (or “irresponsibility deals,” as the Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP) labels them (p 6). Derek Yach, late of Pepsi, believes that “market led solutions, when combined with public policies, will make healthy choices the default option.” Epidemiologist Klim McPherson counters with the food industry's (successful) one billion euro campaign “to dissuade the European parliament from legislating proper labelling of food.” Rather than being part of the solution, markets and their exploitation are “the dominant cause of most long term health problems such as obesity,”

he writes. Make what you will of global food giants' participation in Mexico's National Crusade Against Hunger (p 6).

In its report, SHAAP argues that the health of millions is being endangered by unregulated free markets. Recently, UK Prime Minister David Cameron has had second thoughts over his initial firm commitment to a minimum price, while the health secretary apparently doesn't share his predecessor's enthusiasm for plain cigarette packaging. Are we headed for a world where the individual is left free to choose his or her poison?

If so, it's a world where one would not be surprised to encounter the ghost of Baroness Thatcher. In his Observations column, former *BMJ* editor Richard Smith, who joined the *BMJ* a month before she became prime minister in 1979, reflects on the “Thatcher years” in Britain. “Suppressed in those early days was a government report on alcohol that showed clearly that increasing its price was the most effective way to reduce the harm it caused” he wrote. “Thatcher didn't seem to want to hear any evidence that didn't fit with her view of the world... With her ideological commitment to individualism and disbelief in society [she] never liked public health” (p 27).

So it's cheering that Public Health England, one of the slew of new bodies set up by the UK government earlier this month, has already come out in favour of a minimum price for alcohol and plain packaging of cigarettes (doi:10.1136/bmj.f2018). Things can only get better.

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