

MINERVA

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Transverse ultrasound image through the orbit

Try the anatomy quiz in
ENDGAMES, p 40

Many doctors spend their late puberty and early adulthood competing to be clever in laboratories. Later in life, the bigger the laboratory, the cleverer the doctor is deemed to be. But in a medical literature cluttered with arcane and complex laboratory measurements, Minerva reserves her highest praise for simple things that relate to real outcomes. It seems that the best way to predict mortality in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease is by the use of a chair and a watch (*European Respiratory Journal* 2013;42:956-63, doi:10.1183/09031936.00131612). Patients were asked to sit and stand as many times as they could manage within a minute. In Dutch and Swiss primary care, the sit to stand test alone was a stronger predictor of two year mortality (area under curve 0.78) than body mass index (0.52), forced expiratory volume in one second (0.61), dyspnoea (0.63), and handgrip strength (0.62).

The other way in which aspiring doctors are traditionally taught to show cleverness is by eliciting subtle clinical signs named after bygone physicians or couched in Graeco-Roman gobbledegook. Minerva thinks the way that real doctors should do it is by following simple quick protocols such as the newly minted pGALS, which stands for paediatric Gait, Arms, Legs, and Spine (*Pediatric Rheumatology* 2013;11:44, doi:10.1186/1546-0096-11-44). This open access article provides clear colour pictures of what to look for when you examine the musculoskeletal system of a child. Why not share these with the child and parent while you go along?

Although he is very good at sharing with us the sensory experiences of Dublin a century ago, Mr Leopold Bloom of *Ulysses* (James Joyce, 1922) failed to report regular measurements of chemical and particulate air pollution in that city. Today this task falls to Drs Lyons, Chotirmall, O'Riordan, and Silke, worthy successors of the great Celtic doctors mentioned in Joyce's novel, the O'Shiels, the O'Hickeys, and the O'Lees. Their report in *QJM* (2013, doi:10.1093/qjmed/hct253) tells us that despite Dublin's belated ban on bituminous coal in 1990, mortality among medical admissions at St James's Hospital between 2002 and 2011 remains significantly



A 25 year old man with short bowel syndrome received several intravenous antibiotics and antifungal agents, including micafungin, for Hickman line sepsis. Within 48 hours, and with no history of trauma, contact irritants, or potential sensitisation, he developed a well demarcated exfoliative dermatitis limited to the buttocks and groin. This distinctive rash was clinically in keeping with systemic drug related intertriginous and flexural exanthema (SDRIFE), also known as baboon syndrome. Several drugs, mostly antibiotics, have been reported as triggers. The disorder is generally self limiting on withdrawal of the offending agent.

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Patient consent obtained.

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associated with levels of nitrogen oxide, sulphur dioxide, and particulate carbon in the Dublin air.

One of the great research surprises of 2013 was the positive outcome of the TACT trial of chelation therapy for improving outcomes after myocardial infarction (*JAMA* 2013;309:1241-50, doi:10.1001/jama.2013.2107). Chelation uses a cocktail of drugs of which the principal ingredient is always ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA), and it has traditionally been derided as witches' brew medicine by mainstream practitioners. A reanalysis of TACT (*Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality Outcomes* 2013, doi:10.1161/

CIRCOUTCOMES.113.000663) shows that the benefit, including a significant reduction in all cause mortality, was largely confined to the 37% of post-myocardial infarction patients who had diabetes. More trials are clearly warranted.

Minerva gets about a fair bit, but she has yet to meet a thermal eye massager. This does not refer to some kind of heat wielding ophthalmic complementary therapist but a device for treating dry eyes, which was compared with artificial tears in a recent South Korean trial (*British Journal of Ophthalmology* 2014;98:46-51, doi:10.1136/bjophthalmol-2013-303742). The device bears the confusing label "Eye Cool," whereas it actually delivers heat to the eyelids, together with vibration and massage through a pair of goggles. Used twice a day, it gave equal or better results than sodium hyaluronate drops used five times a day.

It fell to another great novelist of the last century, P G Wodehouse, to celebrate the brain nourishing qualities of fish, in the person of Jeeves the piscivorous butler. And many dietary intake studies have appeared to support this beneficial association. But, this being the science of nutrition, here comes a paper to suggest the opposite (*Journal of Nutrition* 2013, doi:10.3945/jn.113.175695). In a study of 390 older Australians, "higher current fish consumption predicted worse performance on several cognitive speed constructs." I say, Jeeves, better avoid Australia.

Sarawak, at the northern end of Borneo, was for more than a hundred years the personal fiefdom of the Brookes family, "white rajahs" who ruled by benevolent despotism and only reluctantly gave up their domain to Queen Elizabeth II, who then handed it over to form part of Malaysia. It is also remarkable as the homeland of *Plasmodium knowlesi*, which causes malaria in monkeys and can sometimes affect humans. As more people acquire *P knowlesi* malaria, its sensitivity to treatment has come under investigation. Fortunately, a study in *Malaria Journal* (2013;12:425, doi:10.1186/1475-2875-12-425) finds that this zoonotic parasite remains sensitive to all the standard drugs.

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