



Sagittal computed tomogram of the neck with bone windows

Try the anatomy quiz in ENDGAMES, p 36

The median survival benefit of the 71 drugs licensed by the US Food and Drug Administration for the treatment of solid tumours since 2002 is 2.1 months. This figure comes from an article hidden away in *JAMA Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery* (2014, doi:10.1001/jamaoto.2014.1570) called “Unintended Consequences of Expensive Cancer Therapeutics—the Pursuit of Marginal Indications and a Me-Too Mentality that Stifles Innovation and Creativity.” And these few weeks of extra life usually come at a cost of tens of thousands of dollars and severe adverse effects.

Trials of anticoagulation for atrial fibrillation usually choose stroke, death, and major bleeding as their primary endpoints. Perhaps they should add cognitive decline, which seems to be strongly associated with embolic events. In a cohort study of 935 participants who were free of atrial fibrillation or stroke at the start, 48 developed atrial fibrillation over 11 years (*Stroke* 2014, doi:10.1161/STROKEAHA.114.005243). Of these, only the 16 with subclinical infarcts on brain magnetic resonance imaging showed cognitive impairment during the course of the study.

Minerva finds small babies a bit scary and likes reassurance. So she welcomes a new study of the natural course of jaundice in predominantly breastfed infants (*Pediatrics* 2014, doi:10.1542/peds.2013-4299). “Practitioners can be reassured that it is normal for 20% to 30% of predominantly breastfed newborns to be jaundiced at age 3 to 4 weeks and for 30% to 40% of these infants to have bilirubin levels ≥ 5 mg/dL.” For those in the advanced world, that’s 85.5 $\mu\text{mol/L}$.

To discover if damp primary schools affected the health of children, researchers selected primary schools in Spain, the Netherlands and Finland on the basis of the observed presence (n=15) or absence (n=10) of moisture, dampness, or mould. They then collected parental accounts of respiratory symptoms and measured the children’s forced vital capacity. “The prevalence of respiratory symptoms was higher in moisture damaged schools, being more pronounced in Finnish pupils,” they report (*Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 2014, doi:10.1136/oemed-2014-102246). Minerva thinks Finland has a wonderful educational system, but it’s just too cold.



A 53 year old man presented to the emergency department with a two week history of left loin discomfort and a sizeable left varicocele, which persisted on lying flat. Computed tomography showed a large retroperitoneal soft tissue mass in the left kidney with extensive abdominal, thoracic, and cervical lymphadenopathy. Biopsy confirmed extranodal marginal cell lymphoma. An acute varicocele that fails to decompress suggests testicular vein obstruction as a result of infiltrative retroperitoneal disease. Causes include renal cancer, retroperitoneal fibrosis, lymphoma, and testicular lymph node metastasis. Although uncommon, when presented with this clinical picture, clinicians and radiologists alike must act to exclude these diagnoses.

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Patient consent obtained.

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National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines on lipid lowering recommend measuring total cholesterol rather than low density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-C) because this avoids the need for fasting before blood sampling. But a new study of the prognostic value of fasting versus non-fasting LDL-C levels on long term mortality shows that they have the same predictive weight (*Circulation* 2014, doi:10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.114.010001). The dataset of 16 161 people was taken from the American National Health and Nutrition Survey III (NHANES-III), a nationally representative cross sectional survey performed between 1988 to 1994, so it is unlikely to be equalled, or to be wrong.

A German trial (*Lancet Respiratory Medicine* 2014, doi:10.1016/S2213-2600(14)70153-5) recruited 195 patients with stable hypercapnic chronic obstructive pulmonary disease for a trial of long term non-invasive positive pressure ventilation (NPPV) to improve survival. These patients were quite sick, and in the control group 33% died within a year. But in those randomised to receive NPPV at a pressure sufficient to lower carbon dioxide substantially, the figure was 12% (hazard ratio 0.24, 95% CI 0.11 to 0.49; P=0.0004).

In bygone centuries, any hint of madness or epilepsy (the two were often confused) in the family greatly reduced the chance of a “good” marriage. The fear of genetic disadvantage takes different forms today—for example, in the sales pitch for genome testing kits. But the genomics of epilepsy are still not clear, as a study in *Lancet Neurology* (2014, doi:10.1016/S1474-4422(14)70171-1) makes plain. The investigators think that they have found a new susceptibility locus but add: “The data suggest that specific loci can act pleiotropically raising risk for epilepsy broadly, or can have effects limited to a specific epilepsy subtype.” They suggest that future genetic analyses might benefit from lumping (grouping epilepsy types together) or splitting (analysing specific clinical subtypes). Aha.

“Are Barbie and Ken too cool for school?” asks a paper in the *European Journal of Public Health* (2014, doi:10.1093/eurpub/cku097). This case-control study seeks to discover whether gender beliefs and self reported masculinity and femininity are related to school dropout. Minerva got rather lost with the language and meaning of this study, including its final exhortation, “To prevent dropout, public health professionals should assess, monitor and intervene on the basis of gender characteristics.”

When God told Abraham to circumcise every male in his household, he went off at once and did it to everybody, including himself, even though he was 99 years old, according to Genesis Ch 17. Haemostasis may have been a problem in this ancient setting, but there is a traditional remedy that is sometimes carried out even today. It is known as suction. However, this carries a small risk of herpes simplex type 1 infection, as you can read in the *Journal of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society* (2014, doi:10.1093/jpids/piu075).

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