

MINERVA

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An elderly woman with chest pain and constipation

Try the picture quiz in ENDGAMES, p 35

Coping is the currency of medicine. The opposite of coping in health professionals is called burnout, although the word is rarely used about patients who find it hard to cope. In reality, as Dickens said: “we are all wounded in the battle of life, but we have to fight on.” A study of coping styles and burnout in emergency department healthcare professionals in Canada (*Emergency Medicine Journal* 2015; doi:10.1136/emered-2014-203750) found that task oriented coping involving an action response is associated with decreased burnout, whereas emotion oriented coping is associated with increased burnout. “Don’t just do something, stand there” may be the most difficult thing to ask of people.

NEDA is an acronym meaning “no evidence of disease activity.” It is often used as a treatment goal and outcome measure in multiple sclerosis trials. But NEDA success in the first year is an unreliable predictor of long term success. A retrospective cohort study from Brigham and Women’s Hospital (*JAMA Neurology* 2014, doi:10.1001/jamaneuro.2014.3537) found that nearly half of patients showed no progression at one year, while only 8% had NEDA at seven years. Assessment for NEDA at two years, however, had a predictive value of 78% for no progression (expanded disability status scale score change ≤ 0.5) at seven years. It seems that all trials for multiple sclerosis should last at least two years.

A study examining the ecological association between alcohol related mortality and alcohol sales used estimates derived from electronic sales, delivery records, and retail outlet sampling to avoid the unreliability of self report surveys (*BMC Public Health* 2015, 15:1, doi:10.1186/1471-2458-15-1). Sure enough, where more alcohol is sold, more people die from alcohol related causes, with the curious exception of the South West and Central Scotland regions, which had the highest consumption levels, but discordantly low and very high alcohol related mortality rates, respectively.

Men who are in the “normal” weight range in middle life and then let their weight creep up have a better life expectancy than those whose BMI remains at the baseline of 22-25. This finding from the Oslo study of 5239 men born in 1923-32 (*Age and Ageing* 2015, doi:10.1093/



A soldier was injured by an improvised explosive device. He had no external chest injuries. Initial blood gases showed pulmonary artery oxygen content of 51.8 mm Hg on 15 L/minute of oxygen (reference range 75-102 mm Hg on air). Chest radiography showed diffuse central opacities predominantly in the hilar regions, consistent with blast lung—a disease characterised by microvascular haemorrhage, alveolar rupture, and oedema. Lung protective ventilation was started for progressive hypoxia. Extracorporeal membrane oxygenation was considered but not needed. He was ventilated for five days and once extubated quickly recovered. Blast lung has been reported after military, terrorist, and industrial explosions.

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Patient consent obtained.

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ageing/afu202) should not come as a surprise because it confirms what other cohort studies have shown. Unfortunately, men who are already fat by middle age, or who subsequently lose weight, have a higher than baseline mortality rate.

If you look hard enough for coeliac disease, you’ll find it in about 1% of the population, irrespective of social class. But a study using The Health Improvement Network (THIN), a nationally representative UK database of primary care records, found a crude prevalence of only 0.06% in children aged 0-18 years (*Archives of Disease in Childhood* 2015, doi:10.1136/archdischild-2014-307105). Of these, 80%

came from areas classed as least deprived. Clearly, most cases are still not being detected, especially in children from poorer areas.

When gallbladder surgery began in the late 19th century, all sorts of procedures were done and mortality was high. Minerva was reminded of this when she came across an article called “Subtotal Cholecystectomy for ‘Difficult’ Gallbladders” (*JAMA Surgery* 2014, doi:10.1001/jamasurg.2014.1219). Fortunately, this systematic review concludes that subtotal cholecystectomy is an important tool that achieves similar morbidity rates in difficult gallbladders to those reported for total cholecystectomy in simple cases.

About 5% of children stutter, and one out of five of them will stutter as adults. The idea that this is “hard wired” in the brain is explored in a complex German study (*Brain* 2015, doi:10.1093/brain/awu390) comparing motor cortex function in 13 adults who stutter and 13 fluent speakers. It concludes that speech dynamics are coded in the left motor cortex in fluent speakers but not in adults who stutter.

“Don’t worry, they’ll just go away in time.” “But he’s already had them for a year doctor, and he keeps getting new ones.” Conversations about molluscum contagiosum can be tricky, because the mean time to resolution is 13.3 months, and 13% will still be there at two years (*Lancet Infectious Diseases* 2014, doi:10.1016/S1473-3099(14)71053-9). The disease had a severe effect on quality of life in a tenth of affected children.

There are now so many studies of the effect of doctors’ clothes on patients that they have inspired a systematic review called TAILOR—Targeting Attire to Improve Likelihood Of Rapport (*BMJ Open* 2015;5:e006578, doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2014-006578). Thirty studies (11 533 patients) spanning 14 countries met eligibility criteria. Just 12 studies surveyed patients after a clinical encounter and only three of these concluded that attire influenced patient perceptions. The others just asked patients questions or showed pictures. Minerva is a poor judge of such things: whenever she is consulted, people just admire her robes, marvel at her halo, or stare back at her owl.

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