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Odynophagia and vomiting

Try the case review in *ENDGAMES*, p 35

An 81 year old man was referred to the dermatology outpatient clinic because of new onset psoriasis, which was unresponsive to topical corticosteroids and calcipotriol. On examination he had multiple erythematous annular scaly plaques on the torso and limbs. After empirical treatment with oral terbinafine 250 mg daily for six weeks and topical betamethasone dipropionate and clotrimazole his rash resolved completely. Tinea incognita is a fungal infection that flourishes after inappropriate prescription and

application of topical corticosteroids. Fungal scrapings can be negative in this situation. It is an important differential diagnosis to consider in addition to eczema or psoriasis in patients with widespread scaly plaques.

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Patient consent obtained.

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By divine foreknowledge, Minerva predicts that the incoming UK government will announce that the NHS's financial position is worse than feared. Tough decisions will have to be made. What if one of those decisions was to encourage consultants to do twice daily ward rounds? This could save £160 000 per medical ward per year if the results of a pilot in Liverpool were replicated elsewhere. Having an experienced doctor doing rounds morning and evening halved the per patient costs of treatments and investigations despite a 70% rise in throughput (*BMJ Open* 2015;5:e007367, doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2014-007367).

Older people are bombarded with advice to keep active. A cross sectional survey of 3499 Irish people aged 65 and over shows that nearly 70% of respondents manage at least 30 minutes a day of moderate intensity activity five days a week (*Age and Ageing* 2015, doi:10.1093/ageing/afv042). It also shows that the variables most strongly related to activity were not physical health or physical environment but hours spent sitting per day, sex, functional ability, mental health, and employment status.

Many studies have shown that people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) can usually tolerate cardio-specific β adrenergic blockers. But in situations where these agents have known mortality benefits, such as in systolic heart failure and after myocardial infarction, they are still often not given for fear of inducing bronchospasm. The splendidly named SWEDEHEART study allows the collection of whole nation data on cardiovascular events in Sweden. It showed that patients with COPD who were discharged with β blockers after a

myocardial infarction had a lower all cause mortality compared with patients not prescribed these agents (*Journal of the American Heart Association* 2015;4:e001611, doi:10.1161/JAHA.114.001611). Perhaps a future study should look at whether patients with COPD and cardiovascular disease who take long acting inhaled β adrenergic stimulants do worse than those who do not.

Selling fake drugs is frankly despicable. It is also a massive global trade, and we have a poor understanding of how widely these products penetrate into legitimate supply chains, according to a survey in the *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* (2015, doi:10.4269/ajtmh.14-0389). Two of the study authors came from the Pharmaceutical Security Institute, Vienna, USA, and it found that anti-infective agents were the most prevalent class of fake drugs. For film buffs this may stir memories of *The Third Man* (1949) set in Vienna, Austria, the plot of which revolves around children dying after being given fake penicillin.

Not much higher in Minerva's moral scale comes the deliberate overpricing of drugs for disabling and life threatening conditions. A study in *Neurology* (2015, doi:10.1212/WNL.0000000000001608) looks at the pricing trajectories of disease modifying therapies (DMT) for multiple sclerosis in the US over the past 20 years. Production costs have fallen for most of these drugs, while original effect estimates have not been fulfilled. Yet prices of these agents have increased annually at rates five to seven times higher than that of prescription drugs, and newer DMTs commonly entered the market at a cost that was 25-60% higher than existing ones.

In a newly reported trial from 29 centres in the UK and one in Canada, patients with ruptured abdominal aortic aneurysms had a one year mortality rate of 41-45%, regardless of whether they had an open or endovascular repair (*European Heart Journal* 2015, doi:10.1093/eurheartj/ehv125). But those who had the closed procedure left hospital nine days sooner on average and showed a better quality of life.

When the border between East and West Germany was opened in 1989, liberated easterners crossed over keenly searching for new fruits. For a time they were referred to as *Bananenleute*. A recent survey across Poland, the Czech Republic, and Russia shows that even now consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables tends to fall the further east you go (*European Journal of Preventive Cardiology* 2015, doi:10.1177/2047487315582320). The study also finds that fruit and vegetable intake is linked with reduced cardiovascular mortality in these populations, especially in those who smoke or have high blood pressure.

Auricular acupuncture is an invention of the French neurologist Paul Nogier, who described mapping of the whole body on the surface of the ear in 1956. The idea was eagerly adopted in China, where ear maps incorporate the traditional meridian system. The needles used are often augmented with seeds or pellets. A new systematic review from China seeks to discover whether such treatment is effective for primary insomnia (*BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine* 2015;15:103, doi:10.1186/s12906-015-0606-7). It concludes that better studies are needed to decide whether sticking needles into peoples' ears is a good way of helping them to sleep.

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