



An unusual case of severe anaemia and lymphocytosis

Try the case review in ENDGAMES, p 35

Multimorbidity is a buzzword that can mean anything, given the infinite number of ways that illnesses can combine. But in real life illnesses tend to cluster together, and this is explored in a study based on clinical data from 170 583 patients aged 55 years or more registered at 158 general practices in the Netherlands (*Family Practice* 2015, doi:10.1093/fampra/cmv037). To make the analysis manageable, the authors drew up a list of the top 24 conditions and found that, among the 120 480 patients with one of these, 62% had at least one other. The clustering patterns are illustrated in a series of fascinating figures.

Of course it helps if patients, GPs, and specialists can agree on what conditions people with multimorbidity actually have. A qualitative study from Germany, where GPs and specialists do not always communicate with each other, shows that misunderstandings and false labelling can occur in many ways (*BMC Family Practice* 2015;16:68, doi:10.1186/s12875-015-0286-x). Multimisperception may be as common as multimorbidity.

In his madness soliloquy, Shakespeare's Hamlet wishes that "the Everlasting had not fixed his canon 'gainst self-slaughter." While the Prince of Denmark went on to be rather than not to be, until he was killed by someone else, religious considerations do not seem to affect suicide in a study of UK census data. In fully adjusted models that analysed 1119 cases of suicide (*British Journal of Psychiatry* 2015;206:466-70, doi:10.1192/bjp.bp.113.128694), Roman Catholics, Protestants, and those professing no religion recorded similar risks.

The ABO and Rhesus blood types still suffice for most transfusion purposes, but the rarer forms of incompatibility can pose a problem and cause delay and expense because of the need to perform antigen serology. Enter genomics. A team in Wisconsin established a red cell genotype database from 2010 onwards, accumulating data for 43 066 blood donors (*Lancet Haematology* 2015, doi:10.1016/S2352-3026(15)00090-3). Using the database, they were able to meet 94.8% of requests for antigen negative blood without the need for serology.



A 54 year old man presented with a three day history of neck stiffness and odynophagia, but remained systemically well. Blood tests were normal, except for a C reactive protein of 952.4 nmol/L. Computed tomography identified retropharyngeal fluid and amorphous calcification (B) just inferior to the C1 arch (A), where the longus coli lies. A diagnosis of acute calcific prevertebral tendinitis was made. He recovered fully after a course of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. This condition is differentiated from retropharyngeal infection by the presentation: sudden/rapid onset neck and throat pain, worsened by head movement and swallowing. Most patients are 30-60 years old; the presumed mechanism of disease is deposition of hydroxyapatite crystals with secondary inflammatory tendinitis.

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A German prospective survey of 590 female survivors of Hodgkin's lymphoma treated before the age of 18 years comes up with generally favourable news about parenthood (*Lancet Oncology* 2015, doi:10.1016/S1470-2045(15)70140-3). The incidence of childbearing did not differ between this cohort and the female German population for any age group up to 40, with a lower incidence only at ages 40-44 years.

Obesity can lead to diabetes, which in turn can lead to several bad things, but being obese and having type 2 diabetes can actually protect people against a few rare conditions. A population based nested case-control study of 3650 Danish residents diagnosed as having amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS or motor neurone disease) compared them with 365 000 controls (*JAMA Neurology* 2015, doi:10.1001/jamaneurol.2015.0910). The estimated odds ratio for ALS was 0.61 (95% CI 0.46 to 0.80) in patients with diabetes and 0.81 (0.57 to 1.16) in those with obesity.

Survivors of Ebola virus disease in Guinea completed a questionnaire at a mean of three months after hospital discharge (*Clinical Infectious Diseases* 2015, doi:10.1093/cid/civ453). Although almost half of the 105 survivors reported their recovery as "excellent," nearly all had persisting anorexia. Reported pain according to site was chest (30.7%), joint (86.7%), muscle (26.7%), and back (45.7%).

The opening scene of *The Seventh Seal* by Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman features horses on a shingle beach. Shingles also feature in a study of the economic burden of herpes zoster in Sweden in 2011 (*BMC Infectious Diseases* 2015;15:215, doi:10.1186/s12879-015-0951-7), estimated at 7600 Swedish Kroner (£623; €870; \$991) for each of about 30 000 patients. The authors urge the case for shingles prevention by zoster vaccination for all Swedes aged 50 years or more.

Risperidone is licensed for the treatment of psychotic illness but is often used "off-label" for non-psychotic illnesses, to which we may in future add hiccups. An 18 year old patient experienced two episodes of intractable hiccups triggered by stress, the first of which lasted for three months despite treatment with haloperidol (*Annals of General Psychiatry* 2015;14:13, doi:10.1186/s12991-015-0051-5). A second episode lasted 16 days, and when it did not respond to haloperidol or diazepam, risperidone was tried and worked within six hours. The Latin for hiccups is singultus. Hic est singultus.

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