

MINERVA

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A painful hand after a fall

Try the spot diagnosis in
ENDGAMES, p 35

More than half a million children die from diarrhoea every year, almost always due to dehydration. Sadly, a lot of this is still caused by deliberate curtailment of fluid intake by parents who believe that fluids and food feed the illness. National cross sectional data show that the prevalence of fluid curtailment in children under 5 is 55% in Nigeria, 49% in Ethiopia, 44% in Uganda, 37% in Tanzania, 36% in DR Congo, and 32% in Burkina Faso (*BMC Public Health* 2015;15:588, doi:10.1186/s12889-015-1878-z). Parents who withhold fluids are more than three times as likely to withhold food as well.

Nearly 200 years after James Parkinson's celebrated *Essay on the Shaking Palsy* of 1817, the disease that bears his name is still diagnosed on clinical criteria alone. But a detailed study of patient characteristics from Canada suggests that Parkinson's disease has three distinct subtypes (*JAMA Neurology* 2015, doi:10.1001/jamaneurol.2015.0703). At one end there is a form characterised by largely motor symptoms and slow progression, whereas at the other end is a more rapidly progressive form displaying mild cognitive impairment, orthostatic hypotension, and rapid eye movement sleep behaviour disorder at baseline. In between is a kind that the authors called intermediate.

Flying neutrons are bad news for living cells and for cardiac devices. The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center carried out an audit of patients with cardiovascular implantable electronic devices (CIEDs) who had undergone radiotherapy over a period of eight years (*JAMA Oncology* 2015, doi:10.1001/jamaoncol.2015.1787). Neutron producing therapy caused isolated malfunctions in 21%, 10%, and 34% per course for CIEDs, pacemakers, and implantable cardioverter defibrillators, respectively. Other forms of radiotherapy produced none.

Young women (<65 years) experience a 2-3-fold greater mortality risk than younger men after acute myocardial infarction. And a Californian database shows that they are also more likely to be readmitted after myocardial infarction. As in many such studies of readmission, these patients come back into hospital for a wide range of reasons (*Circulation* 2015, doi:10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.114.014776).



A 77 year old man presented with a dorsal hand ulcer 10 days after reaching into a bush. He thought he had sustained a cat bite. Oral antibiotics had not prevented deterioration. He was treated with intravenous antibiotics, surgical debridement, and split skin grafting. Within days, bluish ulcerative nodules developed at the graft margins. Neutrophilic dermatosis was diagnosed clinically and resolved rapidly with oral corticosteroids. A rare idiopathic reactive inflammatory condition, neutrophilic dermatosis mimics infection but does not respond to antibiotics or debridement. Some cases resolve spontaneously, although many persist. About 15% are associated with haematological malignancy.

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Patient consent obtained.

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Ultrasonography is theoretically inferior to computed tomography for confirming a diagnosis of appendicitis in children, but it avoids using high doses of ionising radiation. It's reassuring that in American practice a major switch from computed tomography to ultrasound has not led to any adverse outcomes. The frequency of appendiceal perforation and emergency revisits remained stable, and the proportion of negative appendectomies declined slightly (*JAMA Pediatrics* 2015, doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.0479).

Several developed countries have now set up Choosing Wisely initiatives, in which leading medical bodies promote the better use of medical interventions and diagnostic tests. The 200 million inhabitants of Brazil might benefit from a similar initiative. In a study of 191 patients who underwent cardiac exercise testing in two outpatient facilities in northeast Brazil (*BMC Cardiovascular Disorders* 2015;15:54, doi:10.1186/s12872-015-0048-7), most had a very low pre-test probability of coronary disease, and 78% of tests were judged inappropriate. Brazilians, free yourselves from the treadmill of futile medical testing.

Despite the arrival of new oral anticoagulants, most people with atrial fibrillation will remain on warfarin. But unfortunately about a third of them are likely to be outside the target international normalised ratio range at any given time, according to data from the US Outcomes Registry for Better Informed Treatment of Atrial Fibrillation (ORBIT-AF; *American Heart Journal* 2015;170:141-8.e1, doi:10.1016/j.ahj.2015.03.017). Looking at the records of 5210 patients with atrial fibrillation on warfarin and treated at 155 sites, investigators found that patients treated at anticoagulation clinics had only slightly higher median time within target range (69%) than those who were not (66%). Patients with renal dysfunction, advanced heart failure, frailty, previous valve surgery, and higher risk of bleeding were at greatest risk of poor control.

By the time the Ebers papyrus was written in Egypt around 1550 BCE, the enema tube already had a long history, and its invention was credited to the god Thoth. A physician who specialised in this mode of therapy was known as an Iri, or Shepherd of the Anus, and the greatest among them was chosen by the Pharaoh to become Keeper of the Royal Rectum. Now a paper in the *American Journal of Emergency Medicine* (2015;33:1113.e5-6, doi:10.1016/j.ajem.2015.01.028) describes "An alternative for rapid administration of medication and fluids in the emergency setting using a novel device." This is a thin silicone enema tube with a securing balloon at the end to allow it to remain in the rectum. Be sure to make an offering to Thoth before using it, O Shepherd of the Anus.

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