

Minerva

Moderate physical exercise protects men against benign prostatic hypertrophy, an American study has found (*Archives of Internal Medicine* 1998;158:2349-56). Over 30 000 professional men were questioned about their exercise habits, and 1986 were then followed up for eight years. Exercise was inversely related to subsequent symptoms and surgery for prostatic hyperplasia. Every little bit helps; men who walked between 2 and 3 hours a week cut their risk of significant disease by a quarter.

American parents are clueless about the extent of their children's bad habits, according to one study of 200 school students and their parents (*Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* 1998;152:1137-9). The questionnaire survey found that parents substantially underestimated their children's smoking, drinking, drug taking, and sexual activity. Many were also unaware that their children carried weapons to school.

Before Archie Cochrane became an icon for medical researchers he was a schoolboy at Uppingham, a student at Cambridge University, a veteran of the Spanish civil war, and a prisoner of war doctor in Greece. Memorabilia from these years as well as published and unpublished papers, early film of field surveys in the Rhondda valleys of south Wales, and selected letters are archived at Llandough Hospital in South Glamorgan. It was here that Archie Cochrane developed his interest in epidemiology, and the hospital is marking the 10th anniversary of his death by opening the Cochrane Archive. Pilgrims are welcome.

Doctors who like football and need something to do on Saturday afternoons should consider becoming a crowd doctor at the local football stadium. The work is not onerous; the doctor at one league club saw only one seriously ill spectator in a whole season (*Pre-hospital Immediate Care* 1998;2:199-201). He patrolled 21 matches watched by over 31 000 fans and saw 38 patients. A minority required treatment, and only five had to be referred to an accident and emergency department. Match doctors have little to fear, it seems, from mob violence.

As an enthusiastic new European, Minerva was pleased to see a copy of *Prescrire*, a French pharmacology journal that is translated into English (*Prescrire International* 1998;7:162-92). She was particularly struck by the journal's straightforward approach to rating new drugs. A quick glance at the cartoon icon beside each review tells readers whether the drug is a major breakthrough (little man jumping up and down joyfully), a

"me too" drug (little man dropping a capsule into a box full of others), or simply ineffective (little man booting a capsule out of the window). It's all busy prescribers need to know.

Newspapers rarely report medical issues well enough to satisfy health professionals, and injury prevention is no exception (*Injury Prevention* 1998;4:292-4). Clippings from 67 American newspapers collected over summer 1995 contained nearly 1000 reports of personal injury. Only a small minority mentioned preventive strategies such as wearing a seat belt, avoiding alcohol, or fitting fire alarms in a house. The authors argue once again that newspapers have a responsibility to educate as well as entertain and should make sure their reporters include a public safety element in disaster stories.

Mumps and measles have been virtually wiped out in Finland and Sweden, where almost all children are vaccinated with two doses of the measles, mumps, and rubella vaccine (*Eurosurveillance* 1998;3:115-9). Vaccine coverage in Finland is 98%, and the last case of measles was reported to the authorities in 1996. England and Wales, Denmark, and the Netherlands are lagging behind slightly but should reach the World Health Organisation's targets—an incidence of less than 1 case/100 000—soon. Bringing up the rear are France, Italy, and Germany, where improving control of childhood infections will be a "major challenge," according to one commentator.

Life scientists who aspire to be the next Richard Dawkins might like to enter a competition to write a popular science book. The Wellcome Trust is looking for a scientist in the United Kingdom to write a book about his or her work that will educate and captivate the lay reader. It is putting up £25 000 in prize money to allow the winner to take a break from research to complete the project. Email Laura Patterson at wellcome@biomednet.com for details of the competition.

Last month, Minerva mentioned that intestinal worms had always been around. Now scientists report that even the Ice Man was plagued by these ubiquitous parasites. Fortunately the lone trekker who froze to death over 5000 years ago in the mountains of the Tyrol, Italy, knew how to treat them (*Lancet* 1998;352:1864). Archaeologists found evidence of whipworms in Ice Man's rectum, but next to his well preserved body they found lumps of the bracket fungus *Piptoporus betulinus*. The fungus contains a laxative and oils that kill whipworms.



This 61 year old man presented with chronic constipation and was prescribed generous amounts of co-danthramer. He then developed incontinence, which led to widespread soiling of the skin. Several days later he had this unusual erythematous rash over the buttocks and legs. Co-danthramer contains danthron, a hydroquinone that is metabolised to the chemical equivalent of dithranol, a drug used in psoriasis. In the bowel it gives rise to melanosis coli, but contact with the skin produces bizarre erythematous staining, with sharp outlines corresponding to contact sites. It should be used with caution in patients with faecal incontinence. Bernard Chin, senior house officer, Andrew Ilchshyn, consultant, Department of Dermatology, Walsgrave Hospital, Coventry CV2 2DX

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Lightning tends to strike people in summer, but winter sports enthusiasts can still be unlucky. One mountain rescuer was thrown 1.5 m from his snowmobile by a bolt of lightning while transporting an injured skier (*British Journal of Sports Medicine* 1998;32:333-5). He survived with minor eye injuries. A combination of cumulus clouds and soft hail, or graupel, increases the likelihood of lightning strikes in winter, but both are difficult to spot in snowy mountain landscapes.

A drinking experiment in Glaswegian men concluded that moderate or heavy drinkers should still be fit to drive the morning after drinking 7 units of alcohol (*Addiction* 1998;93:1829-38). The drink, which was given as vodka and orange juice just before bedtime, had little effect on the men's psychomotor performance the next morning, although they did report sleeping well and being less tense. Most of them seriously underestimated the amount of alcohol in the test drink, and a substantial minority was unable to tell the difference between the real thing and a cunningly concocted placebo.