

All communications to:

The Editor, BMJ, BMA House,  
Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JR  
Tel: + 44 (0)171 387 4499  
Fax: + 44 (0)171 383 6418/6299  
Email: editor@bmj.com

Guidance for authors appears on our website ([www.bmj.com/guides/advice.shtml](http://www.bmj.com/guides/advice.shtml)) and an abridged version was printed in the issue of 4 January 1997, p 66.

© BMJ 1999.

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any other means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior permission, in writing, of the BMJ.

US periodicals postage is paid at Rahway, NJ. BMJ is published 51 times a year weekly except in December. Postmaster: send address corrections to: BMJ, c/o Mercury Airfreight International Ltd Inc, 365 Blair Road, Avenel, NJ 07001, USA. US (direct) subscriptions \$376.

Published by the proprietors, the British Medical Association, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JR. Printed by Cradley Print Ltd.

#### Subscriptions

BMJ Fulfillment Department, BMA House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9TD  
Tel: + 44 (0)171 383 6270

Fax: + 44 (0)171 383 6402  
Email: [subscriptions@bmj.com](mailto:subscriptions@bmj.com)

#### Submissions from overseas

Authors from outside the UK may send their papers to [papers@bmj.com](mailto:papers@bmj.com). Please would you send the text and any tables and figures as attached files, together with a covering letter giving all contact details (postal address, phone, fax, and email address).

**Editor**  
Richard Smith

**Editorials**  
Jane Smith

**News and medicopolitics**  
Annabel Ferriman  
Susan Mayor  
Linda Beecham

**Papers**  
Sandra Goldbeck-Wood  
Alison Tonks

**General practice**  
Trisha Groves

**Clinical review and education**  
Kamran Abbasi  
Tessa Richards

**Letters**  
Marcus Müllner  
Liz Crossan

**Obituaries**  
Linda Beecham

**Reviews**  
Kamran Abbasi

**Career Focus**  
Douglas Carnall

**Editorial assistants**  
Gaby Shockley  
Margaret Benfell  
Sharon Reader

**General office**  
Andrew Woodward  
John Mayor  
Gary Bryan  
Liz Standing

**Managing editor**  
Jane Smith

**Editorial registrar**  
Richard Harling

**Papers administrators**  
Susan Minns  
Marita Batten

**Picture researcher**  
Jan Croot

**Science editor**  
Abi Berger

**Series editor**  
Margaret Cooter

**Technical editors**  
Jackie Annis  
Greg Cotton  
Sharon Davies  
Liz Payne

**Web editor**  
Tony Delamothe

**Associate editors**  
Christopher Martyn  
Roger Robinson  
Tony Smith

**North American editor**  
Ron Davis

**Visiting editors**  
Jennifer Leaning (USA)  
Rajendra Kale (India)  
John Roberts (USA)

**Editorial advisers**  
Gwen Adshead  
James Barrett  
Nicky Britten  
Peter Cantillon  
Angela Coulter  
Teifion Davies  
Robin Ferner  
Ian Forgacs  
Trisha Greenhalgh  
Marcia Hall  
Iona Heath  
Richard Hobbs  
Linda Hutchinson  
David Jewell  
Kevin Jones  
Duncan Keeley  
Tim Lancaster  
Ben Lloyd  
Diana Lockwood  
Azeem Majeed  
Michael O'Brien  
John Rees  
Nicholas Steel  
Sheila Teasdale  
Tom Treasure  
Chris van Weel  
John Williams  
Diana Wood  
Jeremy Wyatt

**Statistical advisers**  
Doug Altman  
Mike Campbell  
Tim Cole  
Jon Deeks  
Stephen Evans  
David Machin  
Julie Morris

**Classified sales**  
Jackie Connor  
Andy Josephides  
Bernadette Kearney

**Display production**  
Catherine  
Harding-Wiltshire

**Display sales and reprints**  
Nick Supple (manager)  
Steve McAuley (CR)  
Simon Walker (GP)  
Alan Walker (Int)  
Sheila Rowe (Reprints)

**Electronic production**  
Palm Springs

**Print production buyer**  
David Evans

**Editorial board**  
George Alberti, UK  
Jeremy Anderson, Australia  
Hirokuni Beppu, Japan  
Lisa Bero, USA  
Donald Berwick, USA  
Tony Culyer, UK  
Alba DiCenso, Canada  
Michael Dixon, UK  
Paul Glasziou, Australia  
Heather Goodare, UK  
Peter Gotsche, Denmark  
Tony Grabham, UK  
Brian Haynes, Canada  
Carl Kjellstrand, USA  
Andre Knotnerus, Netherlands  
Christian Koeck, Austria  
Cindy Lam, Hong Kong  
Alessandro Liberati, Italy  
Pisake Lumbiganon, Thailand  
David Mant, UK  
Jean Claude Mbanya, Cameroon  
Indraneel Mitra, India  
Cynthia Mulrow, USA  
Fred Paccaud, Switzerland  
Lois Quam, USA  
Paula Rochon, Canada  
John Savill, UK  
Jaime Sepulveda, Mexico  
Fiona Stanley, Australia  
Tessa Tan Torres-Edejer, Philippines  
Steinar Westin, Norway

**Local editions**  
Geetha  
Balasubramaniam,  
local editions manager

**Brazil**  
Matriz Brasil  
Avenida Ipiranga 345  
1 Andar-Conjunto 104  
01046-923 Sao Paulo  
Tel: + 55 11 2922 496  
Fax: + 55 11 2922 496  
email: [matrizbrasil@uol.com.br](mailto:matrizbrasil@uol.com.br)

**China**  
Chinese Medical Association  
42 Dongsi Xidajie  
Beijing 100710  
Tel: + 86 10 6525 7552  
Fax: + 86 10 6527 1226

**Greece**  
CCM Hellas  
15-17 Tsoha Street  
Ampelokipi, 11521 Athens  
Tel: + 301 6462943  
Fax: + 301 6462988  
[cmgroup@ath.forthnet.gr](mailto:cmgroup@ath.forthnet.gr)

**Hungary**  
Literatura Medica Ltd  
1027 Budapest  
Frankel Leo u 11 II/8  
1539 Bp, PO Box 603  
Tel: + 36 1 316 4556  
Fax: + 36 1 316 9600  
[litmed@elender.hu](mailto:litmed@elender.hu)

**Middle East**  
CCM Middle East  
PO Box 14228  
15-17 Tsoha Str  
Ampelokipi  
11521 Athens  
Tel: + 301 646 1330  
Fax: + 301 6423644  
[cmgroup@ath.forthnet.gr](mailto:cmgroup@ath.forthnet.gr)

**Netherlands/Scandinavia/Belgium**  
Medicom Excel  
PO Box 151  
1400 AD Bussum  
Tel: + 31 35 69 52480  
Fax: + 31 35 69 48565  
[medicom@knoware.nl](mailto:medicom@knoware.nl)

**Pakistan**  
Global Publications  
Pakistan, 2nd Floor  
Press Chambers, Mohd  
Bin Qasim Road Off  
1.1 Chundrigar Road,  
Karachi  
Tel: + 92 21 214106  
Fax: + 92 21 263 7624  
[mcm@digicom.net.pk](mailto:mcm@digicom.net.pk)

**Poland**  
Polish Scientific Publishers  
PWN Ltd  
00251 Warszawa  
UL Miodawa 10  
Tel: + 48 22 695 4031  
Fax: + 48 22 831 1845  
[zbigniewzawadzki@pwn.com.pl](mailto:zbigniewzawadzki@pwn.com.pl)

**Portugal**  
Matriz Lda  
Rua do Salitre 155-2°  
1250 Lisbon  
Tel: + 351 1 357 1506  
Fax: + 351 1 315 0226  
[matriz@mail.telepac.pt](mailto:matriz@mail.telepac.pt)

**Romania**  
Valentin Tarus  
V Tarus Ro Agencies  
Bd Unirii 23  
Bl 13 Sc 1 ap 4  
70401 Bucuresti 5  
Tel: + 40 1 337 1141/  
337 1197  
Fax: + 40 1 337 2611  
[vtarus@mediafax.ro](mailto:vtarus@mediafax.ro)

**South Africa**  
Tel: + 011 787 5725  
Fax: + 011 787 5776

**South East Asia**  
Manipal Centre for Medical Research  
New Udayavani Building  
Manipal 576119  
Karnataka  
Tel: + 91 8252 70500  
Fax: + 91 8252 70062  
[ggc@kmc.emet.in](mailto:ggc@kmc.emet.in)

**Turkey**  
CCM Turkiye  
Barbaros Bulvari No: 131  
PO Box 9 Gaazettepe  
80700 Balmumcu  
Istanbul  
Tel: + 90 212 274 1732  
Fax: + 90 212 266 0019  
[cm@turk.net](mailto:cm@turk.net)

**West Africa**  
Gazeen International Limited  
84 Bishopcote Road  
Luton, Beds LU3 1PB  
Tel: + 1525 851888/  
+ 1582 583507  
Fax: + 1525 853319/  
+ 1582 583507  
[gazeen@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:gazeen@globalnet.co.uk)

## Editor's choice

### Ignoring doctors: often advisable

One of my most vivid memories of treating patients is managing a man in his 50s with congenital hypothyroidism. He presented to us with bilateral pneumonia and respiratory failure. Should we treat him? After a long discussion we decided not to. The next day, when I entered the ward, he was sitting up in bed reading a comic. Dozens of visitors came to see him because he was one of the most popular people in his village. I learnt a lot about the impotence and ignorance of doctors and the importance of humility.

Sensible people may often ignore what doctors tell them, which emerges as the theme of this week's *BMJ*. Andrew Ness and others reflect on why so many people, including many doctors, ignore advice to avoid sunbathing (p 114). In doing so they invoke something called "lay epidemiology;" people interpreting health risks by combining information from their own experience with what they hear from the media and other sources. Sometimes, the authors (all epidemiologists) imply, the lay version of epidemiology may be better than the conventional form. Thus they revisit the advice on sunbathing and argue that the risks have been exaggerated and the benefits underplayed. *Vogue*, the fashion magazine, may, the authors argue, be ahead of medical thinking (as displayed in the *BMJ*). That fashion magazines may be beating us at our own game is depressing—but not necessarily untrue. I predict a brisk reaction.

Meanwhile people with diabetes are ignoring the advice of their doctors to test their blood glucose concentrations regularly (p 83). Evans and others have looked at 807 patients with type 1 diabetes and discovered that 16% didn't redeem any prescriptions for glucose monitoring strips and only 20% redeemed enough to test their blood every day, as advised. Why are patients ignoring their doctors' advice? This study can't provide an answer. Qualitative research is needed.

Our lesson of the week investigates how doctors would respond to a 19 year old woman who has taken a potentially fatal overdose but refuses treatment (p 107). Many doctors would treat the patient without consent—so laying themselves open to a charge of battery. The authors, who consulted the defence societies, advise that in such circumstances doctors must involve a senior doctor and a psychiatrist and know the law on assessing capacity to consent.

Finally, R E S Tanner describes how many patients in the developing world may ignore conventional doctors and consult traditional healers (p 133). He explores why and concludes, "Traditional healers contribute a great deal to keep human suffering within socially, politically, and economically manageable proportions in developing countries."

To receive *Editor's choice* by email each week subscribe via our website: [www.bmj.com/cgi/customalert](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/customalert)