

# Minerva

Media spin can completely alter the audience's perception. As one writer says in the *International Journal for Quality in Health Care* (2002;14:173-4), one British newspaper's interpretation of the Leeds University maternity audit project was "Birth ward errors kill 200 babies: overstretched doctors and midwives are providing substandard maternity care." But put another way, a different headline about the same project could have been "Massive shift in practice saves 850 babies a year: improvements following introduction of evidence based guidelines and clinical audit are set to continue."

Children with lower urinary tract infections seem to do just as well in the short and long term with a 2-4 day course of antibiotics as those who take 7-14 day courses. The authors of a systematic review in *Archives of Disease in Childhood* (2002;87:118-23) suggest that with the increasing prevalence of organism resistance in urinary tract infections to commonly used antibiotics, short treatments should be investigated further.

The pleasant emotions evoked by the tender touch of lovers are triggered by an "emotional touch" system. Doctors found that a Swedish woman who had lost the main touch nerves throughout her body still had a specialised subset of nerves called tactile C-fibres left intact. She reported experiencing a pleasant sensation when her arm was gently stroked, and functional magnetic resonance imaging identified that the areas of the brain involved in emotional processing were activated by the stroking (*Nature Neuroscience* advance online publication DOI 10.1038/nn896).

Heroin users are at high risk of contracting hepatitis B. A large multisite hepatitis B vaccination programme for heroin users was put to the test in Italy; 88% of the users completed the course and 77% had a protective antibody response. Completion was strongly related to the number of patients enrolled at each centre for drug users. Lack of seroconversion was significantly associated with older age, a two month vaccination schedule, and hepatitis C and HIV seropositivity (*Addiction* 2002;97:985-92).

After lengthy genetic testing in London, the 250 members of the Bene Israel community in Pune, India, are apparently delighted to have had confirmed their genetic links to the "original children of Israel," a group of Jews who are thought to have migrated to India 2000 years ago. The Bene Israel Jews form a close-knit community who have been often

accused of having "mixed" blood, although they never thought of themselves as impure (*Times of India* 21 July).

A scathing article on how clinical governance has failed to achieve anything is published in the *Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice* (2002;8:243-9). The author says that the onus is on anyone who introduces a new method of management to provide evidence that the system works and is cost effective—the same as for the introduction of new treatments. The evidence for clinical governance is missing, he says. In his view, the main reason the NHS falls behind other countries in its quality of health care is its dearth of doctors and nurses.

The benefits of using thrombolytic agents in people presenting with acute strokes depend almost solely on making the correct diagnosis within three hours. A trawl through the records of patients who had presented over two months to one Scottish emergency department found that only 60% of 94 patients with clinical stroke had been scanned and 24% were confirmed with acute ischaemic stroke. The average delay in scanning was 2.2 days (*Scottish Medical Journal* 2002;47:57-9).

Minerva was recently embroiled in a heated discussion about the merits of cervical screening using smears. In a rash moment she said that human papillomavirus testing would eventually replace cytology as the primary screening tool. This outrageous suggestion didn't go down well, so she was interested to read an editorial in the *Journal of Medical Screening* (2002;9:49-51) debating the same idea. The authors call for a large randomised trial comparing human papillomavirus testing with cytology in women over the age of 35, with cancer incidence as the end point.

As a large number of negligence cases arise from anaesthesia, and few lawyers have ever been inside an operating theatre awake, a group of them were invited into a simulation centre to see for themselves what actually happens during a general anaesthetic. The aim was to help them appreciate why every possible physiological measure isn't recorded from the moment a patient begins surgery to the moment they leave (*Casebook of the Medical Protection Society*, summer 2002). Minerva thinks this approach could be useful across all areas of medicine.

The funny man is back and raring to go. Dr Phil Hammond (famous for his acerbic anti-medical establishment wit and cutting one-liners) is taking a radical road show



These x rays are of a 58 year old woman and show a rare ball and socket ankle joint. She presented with a history of a painful right ankle joint since childhood with no history of injury. Physical examination showed a broad unstable ankle, valgus heel with painful ankle movements, and no neurovascular deficit. The ankle joint is a hinge synovial joint. Its metamorphosis into a ball and socket variety in this case was caused by skeletal structural adaptations due to talocalcaneal coalition. The associated valgus deformity contributed to osteoarthritic changes. She was treated by arthroscopic ankle arthrodesis for her osteoarthritic ball and socket ankle.

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around Britain, starting at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. If you too find yourself asking whether the NHS has too few nurses (or simply too many patients) or secretly wonder if Western medicine is a huge confidence trick (driven by the drug industry) then catch "59 minutes to Save the NHS" ([www.karushi.com](http://www.karushi.com)).