

Our question, “Was the media understandably confused over the link between breastfeeding and IQ” (24 November, p 1074) brought indignant letters from readers with a grammatical penchant, so we looked for advice on whether “the media is” or “the media are.” The word is likely to be singular in a generation or two, say the journalists who write the Grammarphobia blog (www.grammarphobia.com/grammar.html). Technically plural Latin and Greek words that have become thoroughly anglicised include agenda, erotica, insignia, and opera, and data has joined them in many publications. Media seems to be going the same way—journalists are already using “mediums” as the plural. But for now, in the *BMJ* we’ll try to remember that “media are” and “data are.”

A 65 year follow-up of a cohort living in England and Scotland has found evidence for a link between a family diet rich in dairy products and a greater risk of colorectal cancer in adulthood (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 2007;86:1722-9). During the follow-up period, 770 cancer registrations and deaths occurred. Compared with low dairy intake of dairy products in childhood, high intake was associated with a near tripling in the odds of colorectal malignancy (multivariate odds ratio 2.9, 95% CI 1.26 to 6.65) and was independent of intake of meat, fruits, vegetables.

Writing in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* (2007;33:110-6) a doctor says that when he was young, he dropped a brick on his foot, and, after yelping with pain, found himself laughing rather than crying. Life at medical school at the “painface” dropped a few more “bricks”—notably dissection, surgery, and interviewing psychotic or dying patients. He responded with the “jet-black humour notorious among medical students.” Once he made the connection between laughter and pain, he started writing poetry.

Steroid injections for “trigger finger” work much better in people without diabetes than in people with diabetes. In a prospective randomised study, in the diabetic group, steroid injections were no better than placebo at relieving symptoms or reducing the need for surgery. The data confirm what has been observed and reported, and they also show that among the people with diabetes, those who did respond to the steroid injection were those with



A 43 year old woman with a known pituitary adenoma presented as an emergency with a dilated pupil. An urgent magnetic resonance scan showed no acute change. The patient made the diagnosis by “phoning a friend”—a dermatology nurse. She was reminded to mention the prescription hand cream she occasionally used. It was glycopyrrolate solution, an antimuscarinic medication for hyperhidrosis. She had accidentally wiped some around her eye the previous night. She made a full recovery.

Linda Williams senior house officer, **Vikram Sharma** specialist registrar, **Tom Downes**, consultant physician (tom.downes@sth.nhs.uk), department of acute medicine, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Sheffield S10 2JF

lower Hb_{A1c} levels, suggesting there may be a threshold above which steroid injections are not likely to work (*Journal of Bone & Joint Surgery* 2007;89:2604-11).

People with asthma feel better after performing breathing exercises. In a randomised trial of adding the Papworth technique—breathing and relaxation exercises designed to help people who hyperventilate—to usual asthma care for a group of primary care patients with mild asthma, those in the actively managed group had a significant improvement in their responses to the St George’s respiratory questionnaire, their symptoms, and anxiety and depression scores. This wasn’t reflected in their lung function scores, apart from the “relaxed breathing rate,” but this isn’t surprising as the group had mild asthma to start with (*Thorax* 2007;62:1039-42).

Psychiatrists, as a breed, admit to appreciating the importance of religion or spirituality, and they also admit to being more comfortable addressing such concerns in the clinical setting than other groups of doctors, and have more experience of it in the context of consultations with patients (*American Journal*

of Psychiatry 2007;164:1825-31). The next biggest group—apart from those who were not easily classified into a specialty—was doctors in medical subspecialties, followed by those in family practice.

Anastrozole (Arimidex) comes out as a clear winner over tamoxifen for treating postmenopausal women with breast cancer who are hormone sensitive (<http://oncology.thelancet.com> 15 December 2007). At 100 months of follow-up in the ATAC (Arimidex, tamoxifen, alone or in combination) trial, the aromatase inhibitor not only proved itself to be safe and efficacious; also it showed a larger “carryover” effect after five years of treatment than tamoxifen.

Women’s spines have apparently evolved to support their pregnant forms without their falling over (*Nature* 2007;450:1075-8). The compensatory changes allow pregnant women to stay upright even when their centre of gravity shifts; they balance by tilting backwards as they walk, and the lumbar vertebrae curve slightly to offset back strain. Men and chimpanzees do not enjoy the same modifications, but evidence from the fossil vertebrae of *Australopithecus* shows that this adaptation preceded the evolution of *Homo sapiens*.

Can some of the neurocognitive deficits that occur in patients undergoing coronary artery bypass surgery be prevented by sustaining a mild intraoperative hypothermia, without re-warming? No, according to the results of a randomised double blind study in the *Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery* (2007;134:1443-52). Patients in the active “treatment” group had no major adverse effects from the intervention, but they did not have fewer neurocognitive deficits than those in the control group.

Postmortem brain examinations of older people who had agreed to brain donation on death as part of a longitudinal, community based cohort study in Chicago showed that only 14% did not have some sort of brain pathology. In those without clinical dementia, over 80% had one or more postmortem diagnoses of brain disease. In those with clinical evidence of dementia, over half had multiple brain pathologies (*Neurology* 2007;69:2197-204).