



MINERVA

Are 90% of strokes avoidable? . . . and other stories

90% of strokes avoidable?

A global survey of risk factors for stroke across 188 countries during 1990–2013 concludes that more than 90% of the burden from strokes is attributable to modifiable risk factors, and achieving control of behavioural and metabolic risk factors could avert more than three quarters of strokes around the world (*Lancet Neurol* doi:10.1016/S1474-4422(16)30073-4). Air pollution is emerging as an important contributor, especially in low and middle income countries. Most of the solutions suggested—increases in physical activity, improvements in diet, reduction in obesity, and improvement in air quality—would have benefits well beyond stroke prevention.

Futile treatment at end of life

“You do a procedure because it can be done” is one of many telling quotations in a qualitative study of the reasons doctors give for providing futile treatment at the end of life (*J Med Ethics* doi:10.1136/medethics-2016-103370). Many more categories of reasons emerge from 96 semi-structured, in-depth interviews across a range of specialties in three large Brisbane hospitals.

Old and hypotensive

The number of older people taking blood pressure lowering drugs is likely to rise with the publication of the 75 year old or more subgroup analysis of the Systolic Blood Pressure Intervention Trial (SPRINT, *JAMA* doi:10.1001/jama.2016.7050), showing that treatment to a target systolic blood pressure of 120 mm Hg reduces cardiovascular events and mortality over three or more years. But a retrospective observational cohort study of 11 167 people aged more than 70 years registered with primary care providers in Kent found that systolic blood pressure was below 120 mm Hg in 1297 people (844 taking antihypertensives), below 110 mm Hg in 474 (313 taking antihypertensives), and below 100 mm Hg in 128 (89 taking antihypertensives) (doi:10.1093/ageing/afw120). Hypotension was independently associated with mortality, acute kidney injury, and hospital admission.

Trench fever and typhus

In an overcrowded male youth rehabilitation centre on an island in western Rwanda in 2012, there were nearly 200 cases of major illness and seven deaths from typhus or trench fever (*Am J Trop Med Hyg* doi:10.4269/ajtmh.15-0643). The main

organisms responsible were *Rickettsia prowazekii* and *Bartonella quintana*. One hundred years after the Somme, these organisms can still spread easily among louse infected men sharing mattresses and lacking basic hygiene.

Suicide after self harm: still unpredictable

A systematic review of 12 studies on risk factors and seven studies on risk scales for suicide after self harm concludes that no predictive scales are useful, and could be dangerous by falsely classifying some people as low risk (*Br J Psychiatry* doi:10.1192/bjp.bp.115.170050). The leading risk factors that emerged were male sex, earlier self harm, physical illness, and suicidal intent: none of them specific enough to be of value in individual assessment.

Capillary refill in febrile kids

Capillary refill time of more than two seconds in children with fever is supposed to help in the diagnosis of serious bacterial infection. A study of 1193 previously healthy, febrile children who arrived consecutively at a Dutch paediatric emergency department examined the agreement between peripheral and central capillary refill time (pCRT/cCRT) and their diagnostic values for detecting serious bacterial infection (*Arch Dis Child* doi:10.1136/archdischild-2015-308519). It showed that only a small proportion of febrile children at risk for serious infections at the emergency department show abnormal capillary refill time values. Both abnormal pCRT and abnormal cCRT (defined as >2 seconds) performed poorly and were unhelpful for detecting serious bacterial infection in a general population of febrile children.

Cabbage to soothe troubled breast

Minerva is often portrayed as a rather full bodied goddess. But being chaste she has never experienced the discomfort of breast engorgement during lactation, the subject of a new Cochrane review (doi:10.1002/14651858.CD006946.pub3). This covers the evidence for treatments ranging across acupuncture, ultrasonography, acupressure, scraping therapy (*Gua Sha*), cold breast-packs and electromechanical massage, and three medical treatments. And cabbage leaves (three studies). There is no good evidence for any treatment, but Minerva’s mortal friends tell her that chilled cabbage leaves do provide some comfort to the affected appendage. Also, they can be boiled and eaten after use.