over eight years, which could not now be repeated as an untreated control would be considered unethical. Mortality data from the trial showed a significant reduction in fatal myocardial infarction in the treatment group. The reduction in serum cholesterol concentration observed is of a magnitude which should be advantageous.

We conclude that tamoxifen significantly reduces the serum cholesterol concentration in postmenopausal women with breast cancer. This drug, used to control one major cause of mortality in women, is found to be beneficial risk factor status for another. It may be worth exploring the potential of tamoxifen or its analogues as cholesterol lowering agents.

The Scottish adjuvant tamoxifen trial was administered by the Scottish Cancer Trials Office, Edinburgh, with support from the Medical Research Council, Cancer Research Campaign, and ICI. The serum bank was established by Professor A Caschieri and maintained with the help of Dr and Mrs P R Baker, Miss E Michel, Dr E L Newman, Mr G Smith, and Mr A Reid. We thank Miss A Lee for statistical advice.

 Commentary

Midwives and obstetricians come into contact with body fluids so often that they may become complacent about the dangers. Those conducting or assisting at deliveries had the heaviest contamination. Perineal repair was associated with the least contamination because little fluid splashes about and the procedure is not carried out hurriedly. Although the least protected, the face was the least contaminated (8-0%). This contrasts with contamination in orthopaedic surgeons, who run high risks of facial splashes.

The 23% incidence of broken skin is worrying, especially as 35% were not wearing gloves. Recent figures show that in some London districts 1 in 300 pregnant women are HIV positive and about 1% are infected with hepatitis B virus. Most skin breaks were on the hands and especially the nail beds.

Langerhans cells in the epidermis are target cells and vehicles for the transmission of HIV. These cells are thought to present the antigen (HIV, bacteria, and other viruses) to T lymphocytes and may facilitate infection with HIV through skin breaks. Langerhans cells are found in the skin and mucous membranes, including oral, vaginal, and cervical epithelium. Brathen et al concluded that the assumption that HIV infection occurs exclusively by entry of virus through wounds in skin and mucous membranes into the blood is no longer valid.

Our study shows that the current practices of preventing contamination are inadequate and that staff may be at risk of contracting viral diseases while practising obstetrics. Effective methods to improve protection and reduce the risk of infection are being studied.

Correction

Oestrogen replacement after oophorectomy: comparison of patches and implants

Two errors occurred in this short report by C Harriet M Anderson and others (11 July, pp 90-1). In the first row of the table (age) the 95% confidence interval of the difference between the means should be −2.7 to 6.4 and the p value should be >0.1.