daytime sleepiness. Reviewing the clinical features and neurobiology of narcolepsy, Zeman and colleagues (p 724) say that levels of hypocretin-1 and hypocretin-2, the neurotransmitters regulating the sleep-wake cycle, are reduced in people with narcolepsy and cataplexy. In Europe around 3-5 people in 10 000 are affected, and moderately effectively treatments are available, with newer ones being investigated. Patients with suspected narcolepsy should be referred to a sleep disorder service and reviewed regularly.

Cancer risk in coeliac disease is lower than thought

People with coeliac disease have only a slightly higher risk of cancer, not the doubling previously suggested. West

and colleagues (p 716) reviewed 4732 adults and children with coeliac disease from the UK general practice research database and more than 23 000 controls and found that most of the excess risk occurs in the first year after diagnosis. This study also confirms that women with coeliac disease have lower rates of breast cancer than controls.

POEM*

Outcomes for thiazides are similar

Question Are health outcomes similar between chlorthalidone and other thiazide-type diuretics for treating hypertension?

Synopsis In many of the large studies evaluating different treatments for hypertension, including the antihypertensive and lipid-lowering treatment to prevent heart attack trial (ALLHAT), chlorthalidone was used in the low dose diuretic arm. Many clinicians are uncertain if the benefits of chlorthalidone are similar for other thiazide-type diuretics, including the more commonly prescribed hydrochlorothiazide. The authors previously published a meta-analysis (*JAMA* 2003:289:2534-44) of various first line agents for hypertension. In this review, however, they compare only placebo controlled trials of low dose diuretics that used chlorthalidone with those that used other low dose diuretic treatments. Five trials enrolling 7146 participants were identified. Both treatments were equally superior to placebo in reducing both cardiovascular disease morbidity and mortality and all cause mortality.

Bottom line The benefits are similar when treating hypertension with chlorthalidone or other thiazide-type diuretics. The dose should be in the low range (no more than 25 mg of hydrochlorothiazide).

Level of evidence 1a (see www.infopoems.com/levels/html). Systematic reviews (with homogeneity) of randomised controlled trials.

Psaty BM, Lumley T, Furberg CD. Meta-analysis of health outcomes of chlorthalidone-based vs nonchlorthalidone-based low-dose diuretic therapies. *JAMA* 2004;292:43-4.

* Patient-Oriented Evidence that Matters. See editorial (*BMJ* 2002;325:983)

Editor's choice

Is it better to be smart or stupid?

At a meeting last week I was reminded of a quote by Victor Hugo: "A stand can be made against invasion by an army; no stand can be made against invasion of an idea." We'd like to think your cluttered heads permit invasion by a few ideas from each week's *BMJ* about how to make decisions on patient management or policy making, things that are useful in day to day practice. One of the criticisms we often hear is that this focus misses some of the more innovative and interesting work done to test early ideas and hypotheses. In response we introduced an occasional section called research pointers, studies that wowed us but were a little removed from patient care or policy change. Some readers may have never seen this section, but this is no shaggy dog story.

We now publish a study that wowed (some of) us so much that we're breaking out of the research pointer format—which is 600 words, five references, and one table—and publishing a full paper because the methods and findings deserve thorough scrutiny. Carolyn Willis and colleagues will please dog lovers everywhere with their finding that dogs can sniff urine and diagnose bladder cancer (p 712). The *BMJ*'s usual policy is to diligently divert animal research to other journals, but this paper had us slobbering.

The findings do not sound as absurd as you might think when you consider that man's best friend (or Santa's Little Helper, as fans of the Simpsons might say) can track criminals and sniff out crack cocaine. Tumours produce volatile organic compounds, some of which have distinctive odours. Tim Cole, one of the *BMJ*'s statisticians and the owner of a chocolate labrador, describes the study as simple and elegant. Are dogs more cost effective than clincal assays? Would the findings be the same if the study were repeated? Should we set up mobile kennels to screen the population?

The rest is up to you; it is an idea to mull over. The next time a dog sniffs your crotch—as even other people's dogs tend to do—what will you think? Will you think the dog smart or stupid? Ernst Mayr, an evolutionary biologist, argued that lower, more stupid life forms are far better at survival than smart ones—as judged by biological success. The stupidity of beetles and bacteria provides them with an advantage over the intelligent human species, whose pre-eminence, argues Mayr, is a biological error that is about to come to the end of its allotted 100 000 years of life on earth. Noam Chomsky extrapolated from this: "We are entering a period of human history that may provide an answer to the question of whether it is better to be smart than stupid." Possibly. But if dogs turn out to be smart and stupid, what does that mean?

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