not only failed to reduce deaths or improve quality of life but was associated with a significantly higher rate of hospital admissions.

Would multiple submission reduce the time to publication?

Most journals do not allow authors to simultaneously submit their manuscripts to other journals. Torgerson and colleagues (p 305) propose changing this, as most manuscripts are currently sent to two or three journals before acceptance. They argue that the change of practice would perpetuate greater competition among journals and shorten publication delay. They also propose safeguards that could be put in place to avoid duplicate publication.

A new series starts: the ABC of adolescence

A series of articles on adolescence starts in this issue. The first of the 12 articles discusses biological, psychological, and social aspects of "developmental tasks," as well as psychosocial and physical development (p 301). Christie and Viner also deal with the issue of communication, providing several practical pointers for communicating and working with adolescents.

POEM*

Vaccine is effective against HPV

Question Is a vaccine effective against human papillomavirus (HPV) strains associated with cervical cancer?

Synopsis This team of researchers randomly assigned healthy women aged 15 to 25 with no more than six sexual partners and no history of condyloma or cervical cancer to receive a bivalent vaccine active against HPV serotypes 16 and 18 or placebo. They administered the vaccine or placebo at 0, 1, and 6 months and evaluated the patients after 27 months for HPV infection or cytological abnormalities. With an intention to treat approach to these outcomes, the vaccine was 95% effective against persistent HPV infection and 93% effective against cytological abnormalities associated with HPV. In the intention to treat analysis, the absolute reduction was 6.4% for new HPV infections (number needed to treat (NNT) = 16) and 3.5% for persistent infections (NNT = 29). Other than symptoms at the site of injection, there were no differences in side effects between the active and placebo vaccines.

Bottom line A bivalent vaccine against human papillomavirus types 16 and 18 is well tolerated and effective in reducing HPV infection and cytological abnormalities associated with HPV. What we need now is a larger, longer termed, adequately powered study to look at the effect of this vaccine on the development of cervical cancer.

Level of evidence 1b (see www.infoPOEMs.com/levels.html). Individual randomised controlled trials (with narrow confidence interval).

Harper DM, Franco EL, Wheeler C, et al. Efficacy of a bivalent L1 virus-like particle vaccine in prevention of infection with human papillomavirus types 16 and 18 in young women: a randomised controlled trial. *Lancet* 2004;364:1757-65.

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

Editor's choice

Questions and answers

Question: Is the role of a medical journal to question or provide answers?

Answer: Both—although asking questions is feasible, finding answers with certainty is hazardous. Questions and answers are the lifeblood of any journal, and here are some examples from this week's issue.

Q: Does passive smoking cause lung cancer?

A: Two more studies add to the evidence that already implicates passive smoking to such a degree that reduction of secondhand smoke must be a public health priority worldwide. Evidence for the causal link is clear, the argument is over the magnitude of risk (pp 265, 277, 287).

Q: Does a doctor's personality and learning style predict stress, burnout, and career satisfaction?

A: Extraversion, openness to experiences, and agreeableness confer advantages at work. Neuroticism predicts a disordered approach to work, perceived high workload, and stress (p 269). But tomorrow's workforce might value all the different personality types in a team (<http://careerfocus.bmjournals.com>).

Q: What has driven whole body CT scanner clinics out of business?

A: The limits of direct to consumer advertising, the power of dissuasion by professional societies, costs, and tests that found innocuous lumps but missed common cancers. Of a hundred people who undergo a scan, 30-80 will be told they need a workup—which will turn out to be nothing (p 272).

Q: Does dumping 20 tonnes of aluminium sulphate directly into the water supply cause long term effects on health?

A: Yes, said a *BMJ* paper in 1999: it will damage cerebral function in those exposed. No, says a government scientific advisory committee, there is no conclusive link between the Camelford incident and the chronic symptoms and diseases reported (p 275).

Q: Are helmets protective in skiers and snowboarders?

A: Helmets protect against head injuries but the estimates for neck injury are more imprecise and may be compatible with an increased risk (p 281). Do you value your head more than your neck?

Q: Is simultaneous submission to multiple journals a method of reducing time to publication (p 305)?

A: Probably, but it will waste reviewers' time, editors' time, and—thanks to inefficient communication between journals—will inevitably lead to duplicate publication and further distort the scientific record.

Q: Can a man increase the size of his penis?

A: "It is possible to surgically increase the size of an erect (and flaccid, for that matter) penis, but it should not be undertaken lightly, as it is by no means guaranteed to produce the result one might be hoping for" (p 280).

Q: Has this given you a buzz for questioning or answering?

A: Take a look at our Question and Answer service on bmj.com, examples of which—like the last one—you will find sprinkled about this week's issue (pp 280, 288, 292, 304, 307).

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