



A 58 year old man with epigastric pain and mass
Try the picture quiz in **ENDGAMES**, p 931

What's the significance of finding *Candida* species in heart blood cultures at autopsy? A study identified 23 patients with such findings and compared them with 10 patients with positive antemortem blood cultures for *Candida*, but negative postmortem heart blood cultures. The results indicate that candidaemia—whether at autopsy heart blood culture or by antemortem blood culture—is an insensitive but highly specific indicator of disseminated candidiasis (*Journal of Clinical Pathology* 2010;63:337-40, doi:10.1136/jcp.2009.070607).

As “e-patients” grow in number worldwide, is there a safer way for consumers to glean good information? In a randomised controlled trial to evaluate a prototype medical search engine, lay participants attempted to diagnose two patients with headache. Controls just used the history they were given and had access to the internet; the intervention group used the search engine. Both groups did equally well with the more common diagnosis, but the intervention group did significantly better with the more complex case (*The Open Medical Informatics Journal* 2010;4:12-20, doi:10.2174/1874431101004010012).

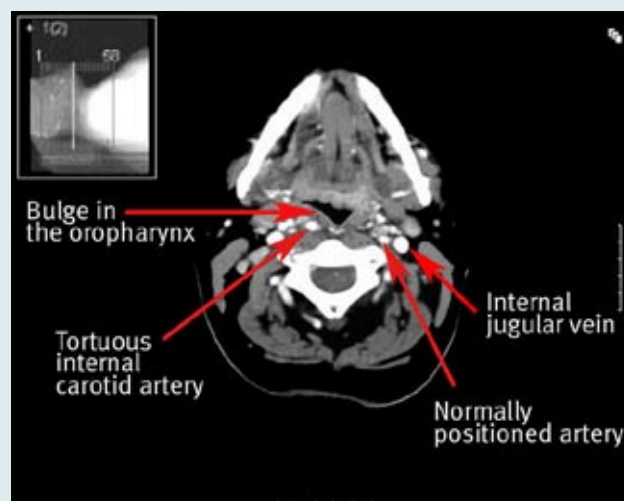
More people have access to a mobile phone than to toilets in India, according to the United Nations University. At UN Headquarters in New York last week, experts from the university's Institute for Water, Environment, and Health presented a report on the “global health catastrophe” due to bad sanitation. It included a nine point prescription for achieving the Millennium Development Goal for sanitation by 2015. The report says it costs \$300 to build a toilet, but there's a return of up to \$34 for every dollar spent on sanitation, realised through reduced poverty and health costs and higher productivity (<http://dl.dropbox.com/u/3960397/sanitationUNUreport.pdf>).

Thyroxine is the usual treatment for hypothyroidism, but in some situations substitution with liothyronine may be desirable (although this drug has a shorter half life). A randomised double blind crossover study of levothyroxine and liothyronine in patients who'd had a thyroidectomy reported the pharmacodynamic equivalence of the two treatments. Equivalence was achieved when liothyronine was substituted for levothyroxine with a thrice daily regimen at a ratio of approximately 1:3. This information will be useful when a sustained release preparation of liothyronine

A 47 year old woman was referred by her GP with an acute history of predominantly right sided sore throat, thought to be quinsy. Examination showed a bulge in the right posterior pharyngeal wall and neutrophilia. We suspected a retropharyngeal abscess. A computed tomography scan showed a tortuous right internal carotid artery bulging into the oropharynx. Her symptoms were attributable to reactive retropharyngeal lymph nodes superior to the artery. Submucosal masses in the pharynx should be approached with suspicion; attempts to biopsy or transorally drain such an aberration would result in catastrophic haemorrhage and possibly death.

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becomes commercially available (*Clinical Endocrinology* 2010;72:709-15, doi:10.1111/j.1365-2265.2009.03700.x).

Is there a relation between sedation and infection in ventilated patients? Prolonged exposure to risk factors for infection—micro-aspiration, gastrointestinal motility disturbances, microcirculatory disturbances—are all mechanisms by which sedation may favour infection. Sedatives and analgesics themselves hold properties that influence the immune system. Available data don't point to one sedating agent or another as the best to reduce the risk of infection, but sedation strategies aiming to reduce the duration of mechanical ventilation should be adopted and promoted (*Critical Care* 2010;14:R30, doi:10.1186/cc8907).

A fully wearable artificial pancreas system might revolutionise the treatment of type 1 diabetes. Scientists have invented a device that uses a computer algorithm to balance sugar levels using both insulin and glucagon simultaneously, with two pumps instead of the conventional single one. Tests in humans produced no hypoglycaemia that needed treatment, and the use of a tiny chip instead of a laptop device is now under way (*Science Translational Medicine* 2010;2:27ra27, doi:10.1126/scitranslmed.3000619).

A national UK survey of antibiotic use in acute tonsillitis and peritonsillar abscess found that most otolaryngologists chose a combination of benzylpenicillin and metronidazole more often for abscesses than for tonsillitis, whereas they favoured penicillin alone for tonsillitis. Although this result is in line with national guidance, the response to drainage and penicillin alone for abscesses is so good that the researchers conclude that multiple antibiotics are unnecessary and inappropriate (*Journal of Laryngology and Otology* 2010;124:420-3, doi:10.1017/S0022215109991939).

A pregnant woman who developed chickenpox in the third trimester was falsely reassured by her doctor that chickenpox was not dangerous at that stage in pregnancy. In fact, the patient became quite unwell, developing signs of pneumonia, and before she knew it she was in premature labour. The baby died within hours of birth because of neonatal chickenpox infection, and the patient needed ventilation in the intensive care unit (*Case Reports* 2010:18, www.medicalprotection.org). Pregnancy is an immunologically compromised state and the mortality of varicella pneumonia in pregnancy is much higher than in non-pregnant women.

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