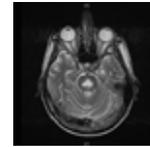


MINERVA

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An unusual case of quadriparesis

Try the picture quiz in **ENDGAMES**, p 38

When both ventricles beat in unison, the heart beats more efficiently, and cardiac resynchronisation therapy—or biventricular pacing—improves symptoms and survival in people with severe systolic heart failure and a prolonged QRS interval. A new analysis of one component of the REVERSE trial, published in *Circulation: Heart Failure* (2013, doi:10.1161/CIRCHEARTFAILURE.113.000326), shows that this benefit extends to patients with an ejection fraction above 30%. A recent paper in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (2013, doi:10.1056/NEJMoa1306687) confirms that QRS duration on the electrocardiograph is still the best way to select patients for this treatment.

Distress is an inevitable consequence of being diagnosed with cancer, and it is commonly measured using the distress thermometer and problem list. Researchers in the south west of England used this tool to measure distress in 112 patients starting radiotherapy or chemotherapy and found high levels in a third of patients (*Journal of Clinical Oncology* 2013, doi:10.1200/JCO.2012.48.3040). But use of the tool made no difference to the subsequent management of the patients compared with a control group—in particular, very few were referred to a clinical psychologist.

The incidence of carcinoid tumours of the gastrointestinal tract is rising by more than 4% annually, according to a review in *Annals of Oncology* (2013, doi:10.1093/annonc/mdt377)—“a rate higher than any other cancer,” according to the authors. Although five year survival remains good at around 90%, as the condition becomes more common, population mortality as a result of carcinoid is increasing.

Summer thunderstorms refresh the garden and have inspired such admirable works as P G Wodehouse’s *Summer Lightning* and the last movement of Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony*. But they can also be bad news for people with asthma. On 23 July this year, the blue skies of southern England grew dark and crackled as thunderstorms moved in; at the same time, people with asthma and breathing difficulties began to crowd the emergency departments of London hospitals (*Emergency Medicine Journal*



Admitted after a fall, this 99 year old man was noted to have a cutaneous horn on his right hand, which had grown to 4 cm over 20 years. He denied symptoms or functional disability and declined removal or biopsy, despite acknowledging a 40% risk of underlying skin cancer. As he had full mental capacity, we had no alternative but to accept his decision.

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Patient consent obtained.

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2013, doi:10.1136/emered-2013-203122). We know this because, since it was set up to cover the London Olympics, the emergency department syndromic surveillance system (EDSSS) routinely monitors anonymised attendance data on a daily basis across a sentinel network of 35 emergency departments.

The entire Fall 2013 issue of the *Journal of Law, Medicine and Ethics* is devoted to a symposium on institutional corruption and the pharmaceutical industry. Minerva has seen the meaning of “symposium” change from a Greek

drinking party, with flute girls providing a range of services to the guests, to a more academic sort of event, although some industry funded symposiums continue to blur the boundaries a bit. In fact, the penetration of medical research, education, and even regulation by the drug industry has reached a point where the scandal can no longer be ignored, even by those within industry itself. Minerva particularly likes the article by Donald Light and others about institutional corruption of the regulation of drugs (doi:10.1111/jlme.12068). Their practical suggestions included separating the funding of clinical trials from their conduct, analysis, and publication; independent Food and Drug Administration leadership; full public funding for all FDA activities; measures to discourage research and development on drugs with few new clinical benefits; and creation of a national drug safety board.

With winter on the way, viruses and bacteria in the human respiratory tract are about to form alliances that can cause misery and death. Equally, commensal action between these micro-organisms can protect against invasive disease. This is a field of great complexity, and the authors of a review in *PLOS Pathogens* (doi:10.1371/journal.ppat.1003057) are to be congratulated on a lucid exploration, ending with a theoretical model that sums up all the pathways by which viruses and bacteria can join forces “within the nasopharyngeal niche.” Bless you.

Minerva considers that PubMed is America’s greatest gift to the world, along with the Hubble telescope and *The Simpsons*. In a continuing demonstration of generosity and openness, PubMed is now going to host comments on all the 23 million papers it carries. Not only will this allow a free exchange of opinion, but it will also, according to Hilda Bastian of the US Cochrane Center, provide an endless supply of chilled water: “This whopping literature database, visited by millions every day, could become one of the biggest science water-coolers of all” she writes in her blog (<http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/absolutely-maybe/2013/10/22/science-buzz-and-criticism-gets-a-powerful-boost/>).

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