

This week in BMJ

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Postnatal suicide

There are frequent reports of increased rates of psychotic disorder and neurotic depression in women after childbirth, which suggests that a high rate of postnatal suicide might be predicted. On p 137 Appleby has calculated a standardised mortality ratio for suicide in the first postnatal year by using national population data on suicide, births, and maternal deaths. He found that although the high rate of psychiatric morbidity after childbirth predicted an increase in the risk of suicide, the overall standardised mortality ratio (standardised for age and time trends) for 1973 to 1984 was 0.17—that is, these women had only one sixth of the expected rate of suicide. The low rate was not found after stillbirth, which was associated with a rate six times than that in all women after childbirth. The low rate was less pronounced, but still present, in teenage mothers and in unmarried mothers. Appleby also found that women who commit suicide after childbirth most often do so in the first month.

Diagnosing postviral fatigue syndrome

The main diagnostic tool for the postviral fatigue syndrome in the United Kingdom over the past decade or so has been testing for coxsackie B virus antibody. In clinical practice about half or more of suspected cases have positive antibody test results. As well as being used to help in diagnosis in individual cases the results have been used to strengthen the case for an organic aetiology for the syndrome. On p 140 Miller *et al* in a large community based study of suspected cases of the postviral fatigue syndrome with matched controls

show that, though a high proportion of patients suspected to have the syndrome were positive for coxsackie B virus antibody, this simply reflected a very high background infection of the normal community at large. While showing a possible association between a high incidence of the postviral fatigue syndrome in a community and a high rate of coxsackie B virus infection their study suggests that the serological tests available for detecting coxsackie B virus are of no value in differentiating suspected cases from normal subjects.

Serum sialic concentration and cardiovascular mortality

Sialic acid is common in plasma glycoproteins, some of which are involved in the acute phase response and rapidly increase in concentration after the onset of an inflammatory reaction or injury; some evidence suggests a relation between sialic acid concentration and myocardial infarction. On p 143 Lindberg *et al* describe a prospective study to determine whether serum sialic acid concentration is a predictor of cardiovascular mortality. In all, 54 385 subjects in Värmland, Sweden, in whom serum sialic acid concentration was estimated once during a general health survey were followed up for a mean of 20.5 years, and any deaths from cardiovascular disease were recorded from the national mortality register. The relative risk of cardiovascular and non-cardiovascular mortality increased with increased serum sialic acid concentration; the risk for cardiovascular mortality was stronger, and the authors conclude that sialic acid concentration is a strong predictor of cardiovascular mortality.

INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

The BMJ has agreed to accept manuscripts prepared in accordance with the Vancouver style (BMJ, 6 February 1988, p 401) and will consider any paper that conforms to the style. More detailed and specific instructions are given below.

The following include the minimum requirements for manuscripts submitted for publication.

All material submitted for publication is assumed to be submitted exclusively to the *BMJ* unless the contrary is stated.

Manuscripts will be acknowledged; letters will not be unless a stamped addressed envelope is enclosed.

Papers will normally be refereed and may be statistically assessed before acceptance.

Authors should give their names and initials, their posts at the time they did the work, and one degree or diploma. All authors must sign their consent to publication.

Three copies should be submitted. If the manuscript is rejected these will be shredded.

Typing should be on one side of the paper, with double spacing between the lines and 5 cm margins at the top and left hand side of the sheet.

Abbreviations should not be used in the text.

Drugs should be given their approved names, not their proprietary names, and the source of any new or experimental preparations should be given.

SI units are used for scientific measurements, but blood pressure should continue to be expressed in mm Hg.

Statistical procedures should be described in the methods section or supported by references.

Tables and illustrations should be separate from the text of the paper. Tables should be simple and should not duplicate information in the text of the article.

References must be in the Vancouver style and their accuracy checked before submission. They should be numbered in the order in which they appear in the text.

Letters to the editor submitted for publication must be signed personally by all authors, who should include one degree or diploma.

The editor reserves the customary right to style and if necessary shorten material accepted for publication and to determine the priority and time of publication.

Detailed instructions are given in the *BMJ* dated 5 January 1991, p 40.

LEARNING MEDICINE 1991

PETER RICHARDS

Learning Medicine is about just that: why, how, and what it is like. Peter Richards, dean of a London medical school, sets out the facts about the entry requirements, selection procedure, and different curriculums offered by British medical schools. He also has his own informed opinion on the less definable qualities that a career in medicine calls for, and understands the doubts and difficulties that may arise as well as the rewards.



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FORTHCOMING EVENTS

COMING EVENTS

British Psychoanalytical Society—Details of two days of lectures and discussions, 23 February and 2 March, London, are available from the society, 63 New Cavendish Street, London W1M 7RD.

Edinburgh University Department of Forensic Medicine—Conference on medicolegal matters, 7-8 March, Edinburgh. Details from the department, Teviot Place, Edinburgh EH8 9AG. (Tel 031 662 0294.) Approved for postgraduate education allowance.

University of Bristol School for Advanced Urban Studies—Seminar "NHS reform and the GP: lessons from Avon," 15 March, Bristol. Details from Carol Propper or Lyn Harrison at the school, Rodney Lodge, Grange Road, Bristol BS8 4EA. Approved for postgraduate education allowance.

Institute of Psychiatry—Copies and details of the programme of conferences and courses are available from Mrs Lee Wilding at the conference office of the institute, De Crespigny Park, London SE5 8AF. (Tel 071 703 5411 ext 3170.)

New York Academy of Sciences—Details and copies of the programme of conferences to June are available from the academy, Marketing Department, 2 East Sixty-Third Street, New York, New York 10131-0164, USA.

Royal Postgraduate Medical School Institute of Obstetrics and Gynaecology—Details and copies of the programmes of courses for general practitioners to September are available from the symposium secretary at the institute, Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea Hospital, Goldhawk Road, London W6 0XG. (Tel 081 740 3094.) Postgraduate education allowance applied for.

Royal Society of Health—Details and copies of the programme of meetings to April are available from the conference department of the society, RSH House, 38a St George's Drive, London SW1V 4BH. (Tel 071 630 0121.)

SOCIETIES/LECTURES

*For attending lectures marked * a fee is charged or a ticket is required. Applications should be made first to the institutions concerned.*

Monday 21 January

ROYAL POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL SCHOOL—At Meghraj Lecture Theatre, 5 pm, Dr Mary Ritter: Monoclonal antibodies: generation and applications.

SOCIETY OF APOTHECARIES OF LONDON FACULTY OF THE HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF MEDICINE AND PHARMACY—6 pm, John Locke lecture by Miss Susan Khin Zaw: Medicine, ethics, and practical reason.* (Preceded by tea 5.30 pm.* Followed by buffet supper.*)

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND PRIMARY CARE—At Committee Room, Green College, 12.45 pm, Catherine Pope: Trouble in store: some thoughts on the management of waiting lists.

Tuesday 22 January

MANCHESTER MEDICAL SOCIETY—At Theatre 2, Medical School, Stopford Building, 5.30 pm, Dr B Lask: Somatisation in children. (Tea from 5 pm.)

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND PRIMARY CARE—At Committee Room, Green College, 1 pm, Robin Knill-Jones: Decision analysis: some medical applications including gastroenterology and oncology.

Wednesday 23 January

ROYAL POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL SCHOOL—At Stamp Lecture Theatre, 10.15 am, medical staff round. 4.30 pm, Professor R Laskey FRS: Control of chromosome replication.

Thursday 24 January

CLINICAL RESEARCH CENTRE—In Clinical Lecture Theatre, 4.30 pm, Northwick Park lecture in clinical science by Dr Michael Neuberger: Expression of antibody genes.

MANCHESTER MEDICAL SOCIETY—At Theatre 2, Medical School, Stopford

Building, 5.30 pm, Ms Sarah Parkin: Green and public health. (Tea from 5 pm.)

Friday 25 January

ROYAL BROMPTON NATIONAL HEART AND LUNG HOSPITAL—At Paul Wood Lecture Theatre, National Heart and Lung Institute, 8 am, Dr M Hodson/Professor M Yacoub: Transplantation for cystic fibrosis. (Preceded by coffee and rolls 7.30 am.)

BMA NOTICES

*Members proposing to attend meetings marked * are asked to notify in advance the honorary secretary concerned.*

Division Meetings

Aldershot and Farnham—At Postgraduate Centre, Frimley Park Hospital, Thursday 24 January, 7.30 for 8 pm, informal meeting with NHS administrators, address "The new NHS world: the role of the district health authority and the family health service authority," speakers Mr Frank Dunnett and Miss Anne Sutcliffe.* (Followed by supper.) PGEA approved.

City of Dundee—At Angus Thistle Hotel, Friday 25 January, 7.30 for 8 pm, dinner dance.* (Guests invited.)

Doncaster—At Ye Olde Bell Inn, Retford, Friday 25 January, 7.30 for 8 pm, joint Doncaster medical ball.* (Guests invited.)

Eastbourne—At District General Hospital, Tuesday 22 January, 7.30 pm, dinner followed by talk by Dr Douglas Model: "Current medicopolitical scene in Eastbourne," followed by agm.* (Non-members welcome to attend.)

Glasgow—At Postgraduate Centre, Victoria Infirmary, Sunday 27 January, 9.30 am, clinical symposium.* PGEA approved.

Greenwich and Bexley—At Pitts Cottage, Westerham, Saturday 26 January, 7.30 pm, coach from The Paragon, Blackheath, picking up at The Bull, Chislehurst, annual dinner, speaker Mrs Sonia Clarke: "The Pitt connection."* (Guests invited.)

Manchester and Salford—At The Village, Prestwich, Tuesday 22 January, 8 pm, Dr Derek Davies: "Current aspects of diabetes."* (Preceded by buffet 7.30 pm.) PGEA approved.

Northampton District—At Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, Saturday 26 January, coach leaving the main hospital exit Cliftonville 5 pm, to see *Much Ado About Nothing*.* (Buffet supper during the interval.)

North Birmingham, Lichfield, and Tamworth—At Postgraduate Centre, Good Hope Hospital, Monday 21 January, 7.30 pm, agm.*

North Devon—At Eye Department, North Devon District Hospital, Tuesday 22 January, 6.30 pm, open evening with clinical cases and demonstrations of equipment, followed by light refreshments and discussion.

Perth and Kinross—At Board Room, Perth Royal Infirmary, Wednesday 23 January, 7.30 pm, business meeting.

Plymouth—At Lecture Theatre, Postgraduate Medical Centre, Wednesday 23 January, 8 pm, Mr Adrian Chubb talking on the reasons for expressing an interest in the unit going for self governing trust status.

South Glamorgan—At Whitchurch Postgraduate Centre, Wednesday 23 January, 7.15 pm, Professor K M Laurence: "Prevention of malformations."* (With buffet.) PGEA approved.

South West Wales—At Ivy Bush Hotel, Carmarthen, Saturday 26 January, 7.30 for 8 pm, dinner meeting, speaker Dr Gilbert.* (Guests and non-members invited.)

West Sussex—At Dolphin and Anchor Hotel, Chichester, Wednesday 23 January, 7 for 7.30 pm, medicolegal dinner, speaker Dr Peter Goulding.*

Regional Meetings

Wessex Regional Committee for Public Health Medicine and Community Health—In the Board Room, Odstock Hospital, Salisbury, Friday 25 January, 2.15 pm.

West Midlands Regional Council—At Small Committee Room, Birmingham Medical Institute, 36 Harborne Road, Tuesday 22 January, 7.30 pm. (Preceded by coffee and ploughman's 7.15 pm.)