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Fibrinogen, lipids, and ischaemic stroke

The roles of fibrinogen and lipid concentrations in stroke are difficult to study because of the metabolic changes that occur after stroke. On p 605 Qizilbash *et al* describe a study in which they used transient ischaemic attack as a surrogate model for stroke, thus overcoming the problem of metabolic changes. They report that high concentrations of fibrinogen, total cholesterol, and low density lipoprotein cholesterol and low concentrations of high density lipoprotein cholesterol were all associated with an increased risk of stroke. After adjusting for confounding factors low density lipoprotein lost its significance in a test for trend. The pattern of risk for stroke associated with fibrinogen and cholesterol resembles that for ischaemic heart disease.

Informed consent in clinical trials

Informed consent is a key concept in clinical research ethics. The Declaration of Helsinki specifies that participants in research projects must receive adequate information about the project. On p 610 Lynöe *et al* report how participants perceived information given to them during a gynaecological multicentre study. All but one of the 43 women who participated had been aware that they were taking part in a research project; five women stated that they had not been aware that a second laparoscopy had been performed only for research reasons; and 17 said that they had received no information about the possibility of withdrawing from the study. The participants who had been most badly informed were from two of the eight clinics, indicating that the deficiencies in participants' perception of information were caused by the informers rather than the participants.

Risk of severe hypoglycaemia with human insulin

Human insulins have increasingly been used in the treatment of insulin dependent diabetic patients since 1984, but there is concern regarding the risk of severe hypoglycaemia in patients transferred from animal to human insulin. On p 617 Egger *et al* report a case-control study of the risk of severe hypoglycaemia in patients transferred to human insulin in Berne, Switzerland. They found that a larger proportion of patients who were admitted to hospital for hypoglycaemia were taking human insulin compared with porcine insulin (46% v 34%) and that 90% of these human insulin treated patients had been transferred from animal insulins. A history of glycaemic coma and good glycaemic control were also risk factors for severe hypoglycaemia. In a randomised double blind crossover trial the same authors (p 622) compared the pattern of symptoms of hypoglycaemia with human insulin and porcine insulin. For 493 reported episodes of hypoglycaemia patients were more likely to report lack of concentration (52% v 35%) and restlessness

(53% v 45%) with human insulin and hunger (33% v 42%) with porcine insulin. The authors suggest that the symptoms with human insulin could impair patients' ability to take appropriate steps to avoid severe hypoglycaemia. Taken together, these studies indicate that care should be exercised when transferring a patient to human insulin and that large scale trials of the two types of insulin are needed.

Biological marker for postpartum psychosis

Postpartum psychosis has intrigued researchers since Hippocrates, in about 400 BC, suggested as a cause either blockage of lochial discharges or an abnormality of lactation. On p 613 Wieck *et al* have made use of the observation that at least 30% of pregnant women with a history of affective psychosis will become ill again after delivery. Such high risk women are usually well during pregnancy and remain so for the first few days post partum, thus measurements taken in the early postnatal period are not confounded by the effects of concurrent illness or by psychotropic drugs. On the fourth day post partum the responsiveness of hypothalamic dopamine sensitive neurones, as measured by secretion of growth hormone after a challenge dose of the dopamine agonist apomorphine, was significantly greater in eight women who subsequently had recurrence of psychosis than in seven high risk women who remained well or in 15 control mothers. This increased sensitivity to dopamine receptor stimulation may be related to the sudden drop in plasma oestrogen concentrations after delivery.

Adolescent self harm patients

There is an increasing trend for adult self harm patients to be discharged from accident and emergency departments without assessment by a psychiatrist. On p 629 O'Dwyer *et al* show that a similar trend exists for adolescent patients in one accident and emergency department. Assessment of many of these patients seemed to have been inadequate. Patients referred to the child psychiatric service had a better initial assessment. The authors recommend close liaison between accident and emergency staff and the child psychiatric service to improve the initial assessment and the service offered to these patients.

Audit officers

On p 631 Dr Firth-Cozens and Ms Venning review the status and activities of audit officers, that diverse group newly employed to help with the inception and continued running of audit at different levels within the NHS. A large variation exists in their salaries, working conditions, and responsibilities. The authors identify various needs which must be met if this professional group is to fulfil its intended role in making audit work.