

This week in BMJ

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Liver transplants for babies are usually successful

As major surgery in babies is technically difficult, this group of patients is often the last to benefit from surgical and medical innovations. On p 825 Beath *et al* describe the paediatric liver transplantation programme in Birmingham. Since it was established in 1989, 25 babies under the age of 1 year weighing less than 10 kg received liver transplants (25% of all transplants). All babies had end stage liver disease and malnutrition and were unlikely to survive beyond their first birthday. The recent development of reduction hepatectomy and improved nutritional strategies, with advances in medical and nursing expertise, enabled the transplantations to take place. Although the operation was technically difficult and morbidity was high, only three babies died (88% overall survival). The long term outcome was evaluated with regard to developmental progress, quality of life, and improvement in nutritional indices, with encouraging results. This excellent outcome justifies early referral for liver transplantation even if babies are critically ill.

Multinodal goitre responds well to radioiodine treatment

Non-toxic multinodal goitre recurs in at least 10% of patients after subtotal thyroidectomy. Nygaard *et al* investigated whether radioactive iodine treatment was effective in decreasing the size of the thyroid in these patients, and whether function was affected (p 828). Sixty nine patients, mainly with compression symptoms, were treated with ¹³¹I because of high operative risk, previous thyroidectomy, or refusal to be operated on. Most patients were treated with one dose; thyroid volume was reduced a mean of 60% within 24 months, half of which occurred within three months. Thyroid volume was also significantly reduced in patients treated with two doses and those developing hypothyroidism (11 patients; five year risk, 22%) and hyperthyroidism. In one patient treatment failed, and five had side effects. Radioiodine is an attractive alternative to surgery in selected patients.

Coronary artery disease in impaired glucose tolerance is not due to raised Lp(a) lipoprotein

High serum concentrations of Lp(a) lipoprotein and impaired glucose tolerance are both associated with coronary artery disease, and it has recently been suggested that the association between impaired glucose tolerance and coronary artery disease may be due to raised lipoprotein(a) concentrations. Farrer *et al* (p 832) investigated this possibility in two groups, one of apparently healthy subjects and one of subjects with coronary artery disease. Although high Lp(a) lipoprotein concentrations and impaired glucose tolerance were associated with coronary artery disease, neither group showed a significant correlation between Lp(a) concentrations and glucose tolerance. The authors

conclude that raised Lp(a) lipoprotein concentrations are not responsible for the association between impaired glucose tolerance and coronary artery disease.

Quality of life is reduced during the menopause

At the menopause most women experience symptoms, which in some cases persist for several years. Hormone replacement therapy can provide effective relief for many sufferers; however, data on prevalence of use suggest that many menopausal women forgo treatment, perhaps because they regard the menopause as a normal process with self limiting symptoms. On p 836 the Oxford Hormone Replacement Therapy Study Group suggests that menopausal symptoms substantially reduce the general wellbeing of sufferers and that users of hormone replacement therapy may experience significant improvements in quality of life. However, attempts to quantify these revealed limitations in common measurement techniques. This highlights the need to give more careful thought to how the outcomes that matter to patients can be measured.

Asthma is becoming more prevalent in Israeli adolescents

The prevalence of asthma is reported to be increasing in industrialised countries, and air pollution has been suggested as a possible cause. On page 841 Laor *et al* describe their study of the medical records of more than 400 000 Israeli conscripts aged 17-18 who were born over nine years. The prevalence of asthma increased over time and was higher in males, in conscripts of Western origin, and in those living on the industrial coast. The authors conclude that asthma is becoming more prevalent in Israel as in other industrialised countries.

Prescriptions written at weekends are least likely to be redeemed

One reason why patients fail to respond to prescribed drug treatment is non-compliance. Primary non-compliance occurs when they fail even to redeem a prescription at a pharmacy. On p 846 Beardon *et al* describe the factors associated with primary non-compliance in a large Tayside practice. They found failure to redeem prescriptions worryingly common, being commoner in those who have to pay for their prescriptions and when the prescription was written by an inexperienced doctor. With the exception of the contraceptive pill and iron preparations, primary non-compliance was similar for men and women in each of the major drug classes. Repeat prescriptions were more often redeemed than acute prescriptions. Doctors prescribing for patients at weekends will not relish the finding that these are the prescriptions least likely to be dispensed. The authors point out that records of prescribed medication cannot be relied on to be accurate; records of dispensed prescriptions would be better.