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1194 Minerva

From drowned children to vampires

Drowning is the third commonest cause of accidental death in British children, and today we publish the first comprehensive study of such deaths in Britain (p 1143). It shows that deaths are rare in public pools but common in rivers, lakes, and canals: adult supervision is a key factor. Garden ponds and private swimming pools together accounted for almost 10 times as many deaths as public swimming pools, and it may be important to fence them off. Legislation may be necessary.

Five years ago the *BMJ* contained many papers on atrial natriuretic peptide, but recently the peptide seems to have been in retreat. Now it has reappeared in an unexpected guise—as a possible treatment for asthma (p 1156). Geoffrey Hulks and Neil Thomson show that, when inhaled, the peptide inhibits the bronchoconstriction caused by histamine. Perhaps in five years' time the peptide will be back in the *BMJ* commonly, only this time in papers on asthma.

Our book supplement contains reviews of two books that set out to explain genetic engineering and embryology to lay people. Sir David Weatherall illustrates what a difficult task this can be by quoting the Nobel prize winner Francis Crick's stories of meeting a woman who believed that worms are spontaneously generated by apples and people in Cambridge (of all places) who did not know that the sun is a star (p 1187). Brian Hurwitz, meanwhile, reviews a biography of John Polidori, the Edinburgh medical graduate who in his book *The Vampyre* fashioned the most potent of modern literary monsters (p 1189).

Finally, Minerva has come up with two counter-intuitive findings (p 1194): hospital patients who witness a death in the bed beside them are more comforted than distressed by the experience; and a case-control study of adverse events in hospitals showed that they were not associated with doctors working for more than 20 hours continuously.