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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Orthopaedic gorillas no more

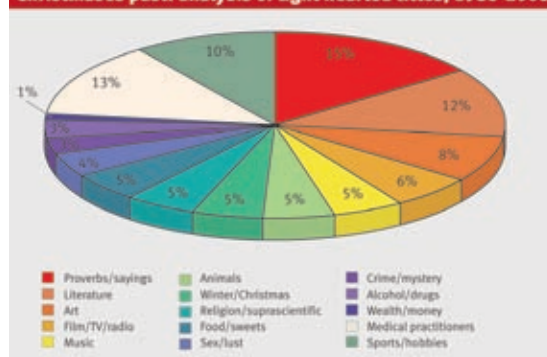
It seems like only yesterday, but the brief run of less than entirely complimentary Christmas articles about orthopaedic surgeons was over by 1990. Yet, like elephants, some orthopaedic surgeons never forget. One recently set a medical student the task of testing his hypothesis that orthopaedic surgeons had been singled out for especially negative treatment in Christmas issues of the *BMJ*.

Journal etiquette demands that I can't tell you what Tracy Sorkin found because we rejected her article. But in her efforts to settle one of the last remaining orthopaedic questions, she generated a wealth of useful information that she has happily shared with us. Her research entailed reviewing the last 20 Christmas *BMJ*s and classifying their articles as either "serious" or "lighthearted" on the basis of their titles. Then she further subdivided the lighthearted articles into 15 categories (figure).

By the time I read her article, I was becoming increasingly bored with the roll call of Christmas chestnuts: chocolate, alcohol, hobbies, odd psychiatric states, sex (this year, in the form of a strikingly nude David Beckham, which, like Sorkin's article, hasn't made the cut). But Sorkin's pie chart helped me to an epiphany—these topics were the stuff of life; banish them and you banish all the world.

One could quibble over the breakdown in the chart. With proverbs/sayings and literature together topping

Christmases past: analysis of light hearted titles, 1986-2006



the list, and money/wealth almost failing to register, it's probably more indicative of the editorial team's enthusiasms over the past two decades than our readers' interests. But, aware that the highest priority of the BMJ Group "is to identify and meet the needs of our community," I can see we'll need to align the content of future Christmas issues more closely with what readers want.

We can tell that we've located the sweet spot when all stakeholders are delighted. The Christmas article on magnetic resonance imaging during coitus (*BMJ* 1999;319:1596-600) is a good example. Not only does it hold the record for the most downloaded *BMJ* article of all time (<http://resources.bmj.com/bmj/about-bmj/visitor-statistics>) but it also won the Ig Nobel prize for medicine in 2000. "Arguably the highlight of the scientific calendar" (*Nature*), these awards are given for achievements that first make people laugh, then make them think.

The lead research paper from last year's Christmas issue, "Sword swallowing and its side effects" (*BMJ* 2007;333:1285-7) was our second Ig Nobel prizewinner. There's lots in this year's Christmas issue you'll find equally original and beguiling.

Happy reading.

Tony Delamothe, deputy editor, *BMJ*
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ALEX EYEL/ANNUALS OF IMPROBABLE RESEARCH

THIS YEAR'S CHRISTMAS ISSUE

This year's Christmas double issue was assembled by Tony Delamothe, assisted by Richard Hurley, Jane Walker, Susie Lanni, Adam di Chiara, Vanessa Fletcher, and Andrew Woodward.

The next issue of the *BMJ* will be published on 5 January 2008.

PLUS

In this week's *BMJ Careers*

That was the year that was, Willett's world, Newshound end of year diary, 15 minutes with a cardiothoracic surgeon

