



Obama to consider global health, p 14



Spain to pilot HIV tests by pharmacists, p 14



Dennis Walder: a life with the bends, p 51



The Healthcare Commission, p 18

## EDITORIALS

- 1 **Happiness, social networks, and health**  
Psychosocial determinants of health may transfer through social connections, say Andrew Steptoe and Ana V Diez Roux  
» *Research*, pp 23, 28
- 2 **The rational clinical examination in emergency care**  
We should tell patients that even highly sensitive tests miss some cases, says Kevin Mackway-Jones  
» *Research*, p 31
- 3 **Innovations in publishing BMJ research**  
Less in the print journal is more on bmj.com, say Trish Groves and Fiona Godlee  
» *Research*, p 37
- 4 **Adjuvant radiotherapy for breast cancer**  
Changes in delivery must be driven by evidence from ongoing clinical trials, say Crispin Hiley, Andrew Tutt, Mylin Torres, and Carlo Palmieri
- 5 **The future of the quality and outcomes framework**  
NICE involvement means the framework will remain part of the fabric of primary care, say Helen Lester and Azeem Majeed

## LETTERS

- 7 **Exercise ECGs in angina; Breakthrough cancer pain**
- 8 **BCG vaccination in children; Routines in collaborative work; Cardiac pacemakers and Wii**

## NEWS

- 9 **UK bowel cancer screening set to save 2500 a year**  
Cancer institute tops research assessment exercise
- 10 **Memory clinics could improve dementia care**  
Pharmacists to offer the pill in London pilot  
Challenging time ahead for NHS as recession bites
- 11 **Test will reduce risk of "first in humans" drug trials**
- 12 **Dutch perinatal mortality third worst in Europe**  
German doctors want easier reporting of child abuse
- 13 **US court: smokers can sue over "light" cigarettes**  
Bush moves to protect conscientious objectors
- 14 **US institute wants more effort for global health**  
Plan to let drug firms advise public sparks outcry  
HIV tests to be offered by pharmacists in Spain
- 15 **Disarray in update to European working time law**

## SHORT CUTS

- 16 **What's new in the other general journals**

## OBSERVATIONS

### ETHICS MAN

- 17 **"But you're not a doctor!"**  
Daniel K Sokol

## FEATURES

- 18 **All change on the road to better health care**  
The Healthcare Commission disappears this year, after only four years. Nigel Hawkes talks to its chairman, Ian Kennedy, about what it has achieved

## ANALYSIS

- 20 **Extending the benefits of One Laptop per Child to health**  
Plans to equip every child in developing countries with a computer present possibilities beyond education. Paul Fontelo and colleagues tested the laptop's capabilities in medical settings
- 22 **Commentary: the joy of mesh**  
Magnus Boman

## RESEARCH, CLINICAL REVIEW, AND PRACTICE

 See next page

## OBITUARIES

- 51 **Dennis Walder; Norman Levinson; John George Clarke Munro; Ganapathiraju Ravichandran; George Innes Macdonald Ross; George Malcolm Ross Smith; Dayananda Sirisena Wanigaratne; Michael George Wilson**

## VIEWS AND REVIEWS

### PERSONAL VIEW

- 53 **A poster poser—doing it in tiles**  
Adesh Shrivastava

### PERSONAL VIEW

- 54 **The new ethics of research into terrorism**  
Edgar Jones, Kamaldeep Bhui

### COLUMNIST

- 55 **Nothing to be sad about**  
Theodore Dalrymple

### MEDICAL CLASSICS

- 55 **African Highway: The Battle for Health in Central Africa**  
Douglas J Buchanan

### COLUMNISTS

- 56 **Humbug? Des Spence**  
**Sorry, you're barred** Ike Iheanacho

## ENDGAMES

- 57 **Case report; Picture quiz; Prize quiz; Statistical question**

## MINERVA

- 58 **Children taking care of themselves, and other stories**



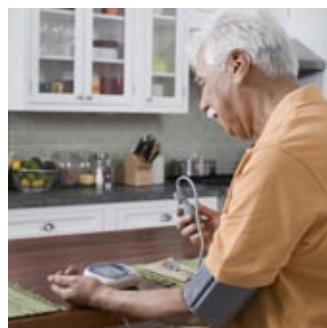
Effects of clowning before surgery, p 12



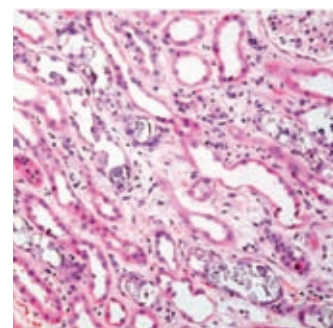
Spread of happiness in a large social network, pp 23, 28



Elbow extension test to rule out elbow fracture, p 31



Blood pressure self monitoring, p 38



Acute phosphate nephropathy after sodium phosphate purgative, p 47

## RESEARCH

### 23 Dynamic spread of happiness in a large social network: longitudinal analysis of the Framingham Heart Study social network

This study of 4739 people in the Framingham Heart Study social network followed from 1983 to 2003 found that the happiness, like health, is a network phenomenon that clusters in groups that extend up to three degrees of separation—for example, to one's friends' friends' friends

James H Fowler, Nicholas A Christakis

» Editorial p 1; Research, p 28

### 27 Commentary: Understanding social network analysis

Peter Sainsbury

### 28 Detecting implausible social network effects in acne, height, and headaches: longitudinal analysis

Statistically significant but biologically implausible network (“contagious”) effects in three health outcomes in adolescents—headaches, skin problems, and height—disappeared after controlling for environmental confounders, challenging the theory

Ethan Cohen-Cole, Jason M Fletcher

» Editorial p 1; Research, p 23

### 31 Elbow extension test to rule out elbow fracture: multicentre, prospective validation and observational study of diagnostic accuracy in adults and children

The ability to fully extend the elbow after injury effectively rules out the need for radiography, making this a useful test, but watch out for olecranon fractures in adults and occult supracondylar fractures in children

A Appelboam, A D Reuben, J R Bengner, F Beech, J Dutson, S Haig, I Higginson, J A Klein, S Le Roux, S S M Saranga, R Taylor, J Vickery, R J Powell, G Lloyd

» Editorial p 2

### 34 Risk of Parkinson's disease after hospital contact for head injury: population based case-control study

Head injury, particularly in the past three months, was associated with a 50% increased incidence of Parkinson's disease in this Danish national study, but this was probably explained by incipient disease or recall bias

Kathrine Rugbjerg, Beate Ritz, Lise Korbo, Nick Martinussen, Jørgen H Olsen

### 37 Randomised controlled trial of Alexander technique for chronic and recurrent back pain: economic evaluation

Six Alexander Technique lessons combined with an exercise prescription was the most effective and cost-effective option for the treatment of back pain in primary care

Sandra Hollinghurst, Debbie Sharp, Kathleen Ballard, Jane Barnett, Angela Beattie, Maggie Evans, George Lewith, Karen Middleton, Frances Oxford, Fran Webley, Paul Little

» Editorial p 3

## CLINICAL REVIEW

### 38 Blood pressure self monitoring: questions and answers from a national conference

Richard J McManus, Paul Glasziou, Andrew Hayen, Jonathan Mant, Paul Padfield, John Potter, Emma P Bray, David Mant

## PRACTICE

### 43 Practice pointer: Interpreting research findings to guide treatment in practice

When applying research findings to individual patients, practitioners can use the PICO approach, which considers characteristics of the patient or population, intervention, comparator or context, and outcome. Patient centred practitioners should however identify the outcomes which are important to individual patients

Tony Kendrick, Kelsey Hegarty, Paul Glasziou

### 46 Uncertainties page: What is the optimal management of partial epilepsy uncontrolled by a first choice anticonvulsant?

This is one of a series of occasional articles that highlights areas of practice where management lacks convincing supporting evidence

David W Chadwick, Gus A Baker, Ann Jacoby, Anthony G Marson, Phil E Smith

### 47 Lesson of the week: Acute phosphate nephropathy after sodium phosphate preparations

Predisposed individuals may develop chronic kidney disease after administration of sodium phosphate purgative before colonoscopy

Andrew Connor, Lucy Sykes, Ian S D Roberts, Charles E Weston

### 50 10-Minute consultation: Sleep disorder (insomnia)

This is one of a series of occasional articles on common problems in primary care

Bruce Arroll, Antonio Fernando III, Karen Falloon



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PANOS/STEVE TORTORELLA

## BMJ/MSF CHRISTMAS APPEAL

A nurse working with Médecins Sans Frontières treats a baby with severe dehydration in Pieri, South Sudan. MSF's staff and volunteers deal daily with extraordinary personal risks and practical clinical challenges. Two weeks ago the *BMJ* launched its first Christmas appeal and is calling on readers to support MSF, our chosen charity. To donate, please visit [www.msf.org.uk/bmjappeal](http://www.msf.org.uk/bmjappeal).

## THE WEEK IN NUMBERS

**13%** Drop in MRSA bloodstream infections in England between July and September 2008 compared with the quarter before (*News*, p 12)

**600** Mistakes made by GPs a day, estimated by the Healthcare Commission (*Profile*, p 18)

**3** Degrees of separation that the spread of happiness can reach (*Research*, p 23)

**£10** Minimum cost of a blood pressure monitor (*Clinical Review*, p 38)

**11 years** Age at which children with asthma take responsibility for about 50% of their daily preventive medication (*Minerva*, p 58)

## THE WEEK IN QUOTES

**"Any woman who receives contraception from a pharmacy without a prescription can still expect a full consultation with a health professional"** (*News*, p 10)

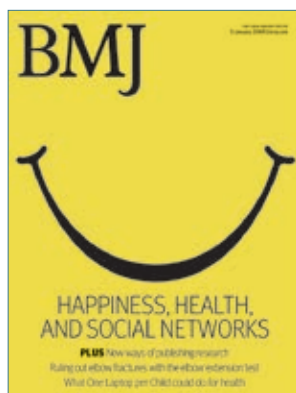
**"If doctors could design a Dante-esque inferno, medical ethicists would inhabit one of the lowest circles, below the statisticians and lower still than nurse managers and sociologists"** (*Observations*, p 17)

**"Caution is needed in attributing causality in empirical studies of social network effects"** (*Research*, p 28)

**"Up to 70% of people who are treated with a single anticonvulsant will enter remission within a short time of being diagnosed with epilepsy"** (*Practice*, p 46)

## EDITOR'S CHOICE

## Networking for health



**Editorial, p 1**  
**Research, p 23, 28**

Contagion has been the curse of human health for centuries. Medicine has dedicated itself to preventing it. But what if diseases aren't the only things that can be caught? What if good things can also be transmitted from one person to another—happiness for example? This hypothesis is explored in this week's *BMJ*.

James Fowler and Nicholas Christakis have been studying the effects of social networks for some time. Now using a unique data set—the Framingham Heart Study cohort—they've analysed 20 years of data on nearly 5000 people, including measures of happiness (p 23). Within this social network they found non-random clustering of happy and unhappy people. Could this be because happy people choose happy friends? Or is the effect due to confounding, as Ethan Cohen-Cole and Jason Fletcher suggest (p 28)? Or is it, as Fowler and Christakis conclude, a causative relation? I think they make a convincing case, as do (with some caveats) our editorialists (p 1) and commentary writer (p 27). So perhaps success should no longer be judged by how many friends you have in your social network, but how happy they are.

A different form of networking could spread health, and even happiness, in the developing world. One Laptop per Child aims to give some of the world's poorest children access to computers and the internet. Wondering what benefits there might be for health communication, Paul Fontelo and colleagues have tested the laptops in simulated developing world conditions (p 20). They were able to access PubMed and BabelMeSH (a multilanguage search portal for

PubMed). They downloaded a 10 page pdf file with colour figures and tables. They read email and "chatted" with colleagues in other countries using Gmail. They sent clinical photographs and short movie clips. And they listened to the *BMJ* podcast (which, by the way, you can now get through iTunes every week: [itpc://podcasts.bmj.com/bmj/feed/itunes](http://podcasts.bmj.com/bmj/feed/itunes)). There were things they couldn't do, but the potential benefits for medical education, telemedicine, and public health seem substantial.

With ever improving wireless access, software, and computer technology, the internet as a means of global communication is clearly better and greener than print. And it's where we think the results of medical research belong. This may not seem a contentious statement, but there are still authors who like to see their work in print as well as online. The challenge for the *BMJ* is that we want to publish more of the good research we're now receiving, and we want to give each study all the space and visibility it needs. Both things are possible on *bmj.com*, with high usage, open access, and no word limits for research articles. Both are difficult in print if we want to find space for the many different types of content that our print readers appreciate. So as Trish Groves and I explain (p 3), we're trying out a new approach to publishing research, with a specially written abstract in the print journal (p 37), and the full text (with lots of extras) online. Tell us what you think.

**Fiona Godlee, editor, *BMJ*** [fgodlee@bmj.com](mailto:fgodlee@bmj.com)

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[clinicalevidence.bmj.com](http://clinicalevidence.bmj.com)

***Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health***

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**PLUS**

Career Focus, jobs, and courses appear after p 56.

## WHAT'S NEW ON BMJ.COM

This week sees the launch of the BMJ's weekly podcast, bringing you the latest news, views and research. Jeremy Laurence, health editor of the *Independent*, looks back over 2008, Trish Groves outlines a new way of presenting research online and in print. And leading doctors tell Rebecca Coombes what the priorities should be in 2009. Listen to it at <http://podcasts.bmj.com/bmj/>

### BMJ/MSF APPEAL

The BMJ/Médecins Sans Frontières' Christmas appeal has raised more than £8000 so far. To find out more about the charity's work, read Tejshri Shah's blog at <http://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/>

You can still make donations at [www.msf.org.uk/bmjappeal](http://www.msf.org.uk/bmjappeal)

### LATEST RESEARCH

**Renal screening in children after exposure to low dose melamine in Hong Kong**  
No severe adverse renal outcomes, such as acute renal failure or urinary tract obstruction, were detected in children after exposure to low dose melamine, according to this fast track cross sectional study. Large scale and urgent screening programmes may not be informative or cost effective for populations that have been exposed to low dose melamine, it concludes.

Find out more about this and other papers at [bmj.com/channels/research.dtl](http://bmj.com/channels/research.dtl)



### LATEST BLOGS

Zimbabwean medical student Norman Matara could have drifted into the black economy or taken up subsistence farming after the university in his cholera ravaged country closed indefinitely. Instead he chose human rights activism. Julian Sheather finds his courage a potent symbol of hope after meeting him at a conference in Uganda.

William Lee blogs about a depressed patient who bought a helium cylinder from an online retailer after researching ways of taking her own life. But she changed her mind after it was delivered. "People with suicidal feelings are nearly always deeply ambivalent, and their commitment to the act often fluctuates. This is as true for terminally ill people as it is for other groups," he says.

To find out more about these and other blogs, visit <http://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/>

### LATEST VIDEO

This week's issue contains an economic analysis of the Alexander technique for chronic and recurrent back pain. A longer version of the paper with an accompanying 10 minute video is available at [www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/337/aug19\\_2/a884](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/337/aug19_2/a884)  
A Christmas issue paper about Oliver Twist's workhouse diet also includes a short video where the authors talk about their findings.

See it at [http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/337/dec17\\_2/a2722](http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/337/dec17_2/a2722)



### Last week's poll asks:

**"Should smoking in outside public spaces be banned?"**

You replied:

**YES** 416 votes **(57.66%)**  
**NO** 307 votes **(42.34%)**

### This week's poll asks:

**"Should the contraceptive pill be available without prescription?"**

Let us know where you stand on this issue at [www.bmj.com/#poll](http://www.bmj.com/#poll)

### MOST READ

Festive medical myths  
Dynamic spread of happiness in a large social network  
Everything you know is wrong  
Head and neck injury risks in heavy metal  
RCT of Alexander technique lessons, exercise, and massage for back pain



### MOST COMMENTED

Rugby and its influence on the Catholic church  
The cult of the conference bag  
Should smoking in outside public spaces be banned?  
How should health be defined?  
This allergies hysteria is just nuts

# Time for a break? Refresh yourself.

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