

Screening for colorectal cancer, p 1522



AIDS in South Africa, p 1525



Protests over vaccination, p 1528



Measurement versus doing the job, p 1567

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Remains effective and is likely to be cost effective in the UK, but data need to be monitored, says Martin J Buxton
» *Research*, pp 1538, 1542
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Severe adverse effects can be avoided if smoking is stopped early, say Rona Campbell and Deirdre J Murphy
» *Research*, p 1552
- 1511 Monitoring bone mineral density during antiresorptive treatment for osteoporosis**
Is potentially misleading and a misuse of healthcare resources, says Juliet Compston
» *Research*, p 1553
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The lowest dose of hormones for the least amount of time should be used for the relief of menopausal flushes, says Helen Roberts

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UK should rethink use of Tamiflu, GP leader says
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- 1522 Obama asks AMA to support his healthcare reform**
Germany asks Pfizer to disclose all reboxetine data
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As the MMR health scare retreats in the UK, doctors fear it will migrate to the USA. Rebecca Coombes investigates the crucial role played in this by the anti-vaccination lobby

HEAD TO HEAD

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A drug that can improve your exam results may sound tempting, and John Harris believes that we should embrace its possibilities. Anjan Chatterjee, however, argues that the dangers have been underplayed

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- 1534 It is not wrong to say no to breast screening**
Iona Heath

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- 1535 How do psychiatric drugs work?**
Joanna Moncrieff and David Cohen argue that changing our view of the action of psychiatric drugs would help patients to become more involved with decisions about treatment

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Jeremy Thompson

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David Elliman and Helen Bedford

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1558 What's in a name?

Meat eaters have higher risk of some cancers, p 1520





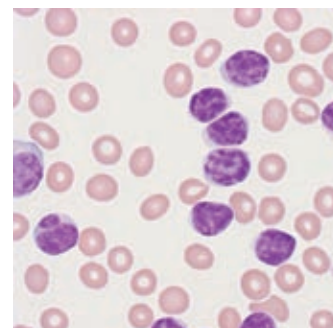
Antibiotic prescribing in Europe, p 1545



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Exposure to tear gas, p 1554



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RESEARCH

1538 Screening men for abdominal aortic aneurysm: 10 year mortality and cost effectiveness results from the randomised Multicentre Aneurysm Screening Study

This UK trial suggests that the national screening programme should, in the long term, halve the mortality rate related to these aneurysms in men aged 65 or more, and will be cost effective

S G Thompson, H A Ashton, L Gao, R A P Scott, on behalf of the Multicentre Aneurysm Screening Study Group

» Editorial, p 1509; Research, p 1542

1542 Analysis of cost effectiveness of screening Danish men aged 65 for abdominal aortic aneurysm

A mathematical model, populated with data from trials and observational studies, indicates that screening men of 65 for aortic aneurysm is not cost effective

Lars Ehlers, Kim Overvad, Jan Sørensen, Søren Christensen, Merete Bech, Mette Kjølby

» Editorial, p 1509; Research, p 1538

1545 Variation in antibiotic prescribing and its impact on recovery in patients with acute cough in primary care: prospective study in 13 countries

Wide variation in antibiotic prescribing across Europe wasn't explained by variation in clinical presentation and wasn't associated with clinically important differences in recovery

C C Butler, K Hood, T Verheij, P Little, H Melbye, J Nuttall, M J Kelly, S Mölstad, M Godycki-Cwirko, J Almirall, A Torres, D Gillespie, U Rautakorpi, S Coenen, H Goossens

1548 Factors associated with mortality in Scottish patients receiving methadone in primary care: retrospective cohort study

Overuse of methadone, history of psychiatric admission, co-prescription of benzodiazepines, and increased comorbidity were associated with all cause mortality

C McCowan, B Kidd, T Fahey

1552 Spontaneous preterm birth and small for gestational age infants in women who stop smoking early in pregnancy: prospective cohort study

pico

Women who smoked throughout pregnancy had increased risks of preterm birth and of having small babies, but those who stopped smoking by 15 weeks' gestation had the same risks as non-smokers

» Editorial, p 1510

1553 Value of routine monitoring of bone mineral density after starting bisphosphonate treatment: secondary analysis of trial data

pico

Monitoring bone mineral density in the first three years after starting bisphosphonate treatment in postmenopausal women is unnecessary and may be misleading

Katy J L Bell, Andrew Hayen, Petra Macaskill, Les Irwig, Jonathan C Craig, Kristine Ensrud, Douglas C Bauer

» Editorial, p 1511

CLINICAL REVIEW

1554 Management of the effects of exposure to tear gas

Pierre-Nicolas Carron, Bertrand Yersin

PRACTICE

1559 Quality improvement report: Comprehensive care and HIV prophylaxis after sexual assault in rural South Africa: the Refentse intervention study

Julia C Kim, Ian Askew, Lufuno Muvhango, Ntabozuko Dwane, Tanya Abramsky, Stephen Jan, Ennica Ntlemo, Jane Chege, Charlotte Watts

1562 Rational testing: Incidental finding of lymphocytosis in an asymptomatic patient

What tests are needed when an asymptomatic patient presents with lymphocytosis?

Carolyn S Grove, George A Follows, Wendy N Erber

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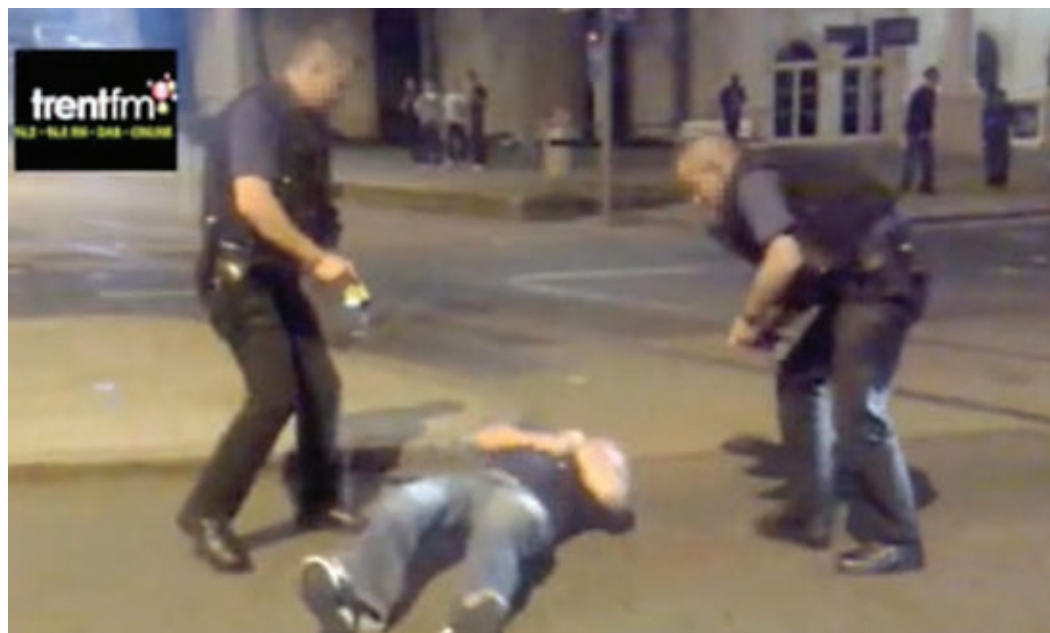
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**PICTURE OF THE WEEK**

Video footage of a man being shot with a Taser gun in Nottingham has been passed to the police complaints body (www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5S4R6sHx9c). Tasers fire two darts at the end of wires, delivering a 50 000 volt shock. Amnesty International has reported that more than 330 people have died in the United States between June 2001 and August 2008 after use of such weapons by police and has noted cases of use on schoolchildren, pregnant women, people who were mentally ill or intoxicated, elderly people with dementia, and people experiencing epileptic seizures. Tasers "are inherently open to abuse . . . and can inflict severe pain at the push of a button, without leaving substantial marks," says the report's author.

THE WEEK IN NUMBERS

8% Mortality among people dispensed methadone in a Tayside cohort over 12 years (Research, p 1548)

30 minutes Time for shortness of breath, sore throat, and chest pain to resolve after exposure to tear gas (Clinical Review, p 1554)

25% Proportion of cancers detected in breast screening that are ductal carcinoma in situ (Observations, p 1534)

1 in 100 Children affected by autism in the UK (Review of the Week, p 1568)

60 000 Patient safety incidents reported in UK children between October 2007 and September 2008 (News, p 1519)

THE WEEK IN QUOTES

"Bone mineral density in the first three years after starting bisphosphonate treatment in postmenopausal women may be misleading" (Research, p 1553)

"GPs might start prescribing Tamiflu over the phone" (News, p 1520)

"Lymphocyte morphology can often distinguish between reactive and neoplastic causes of lymphocytosis" (Practice, p 1562)

"The FDA gave methylphenidate a 'black box,' the most alarming of possible warnings" (Head to Head, p 1532)

"Cadavers are fresh frozen and thawed before use [in laparoscopic surgery training]" (Letter, p 1517)

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Less medicine is more



GARDIPHANE/REX FEATURES

Editorial, p 1509
Research, pp 1538, 1542

It would be fair to say that the *BMJ* tends towards less rather than more medicine. We've published a lot over the years on the risks of overtreatment and the problems of medicalisation and disease mongering. It's not a bad default to have in times of economic hardship, although I hope we also do our bit to highlight evidence of undertreatment where it exists. In a recent letter David Oliver warned that, although ageing should not be routinely medicalised, there is a risk of "socialising" treatable problems in older people such as incontinence and falls (*BMJ* 2009;338:b1200).

With that proviso, I'm drawn to several articles this week that champion the view that less is more, and in particular that if you give patients complete and unbiased information about the likely effects of an intervention they may well say no to it. Iona Heath sets us off on this tack, writing about her decision to turn down mammography screening (p 1534). She thinks the evidence is pretty clear that the potential harms of overdiagnosis outweigh the potential benefits of an accurate early diagnosis. But she's worried that her decision is based on information that her patients can't easily find because the invitation leaflet doesn't mention harms.

This criticism has already been levelled at mammography screening by Peter Gøtzsche and colleagues, first in 2006 (*BMJ* 2006;332:538-41) and, because no real changes were made to the UK's leaflet, again earlier this year (*BMJ* 2009;338:b86). Heath's words are sure to fuel the already heated debate seen in our rapid responses (www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/338/jan27_2/b86). Nicholas Wald, Malcolm Law, and Stephen Duffy criticised Gøtzsche

and colleagues for substantially underestimating the survival benefits of screening. Gøtzsche and colleagues have replied in extensive detail and, nearly two months on, have not been challenged again. In private emails to the *BMJ*, advocates of the NHS breast screening programme have criticised us for not adequately presenting the facts in support of screening. We would welcome a balanced article on this subject. But for the moment what is being asked for is simply that women should be made aware of the potential for harm from overdiagnosis so they can make a more informed decision.

What about providing complete and unbiased information for patients with psychiatric conditions? Joanna Moncrieff and David Cohen think this can only be achieved by changing the way we explain how antidepressants and antipsychotics work (p 1535). Rather than portraying them as acting on specific disease processes, as their names imply, it would be more accurate and helpful to explain to patients that these drugs act by inducing a range of altered mental states. The authors think this could shift the emphasis of treatment away from continuous disease control towards periodic symptom control, with the potential to minimise the harms of long term use.

Finally, although screening for abdominal aortic aneurysm seems to be effective and, for the moment in the UK, cost effective (pp 1509, 1538, 1542), routine monitoring of bone mineral density in postmenopausal women being started on bisphosphonates looks to be a waste of time (pp 1511, 1553).

Fiona Godlee, editor, *BMJ* fgodlee@bmj.com

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WHAT'S NEW ON BMJ.COM

LATEST RESEARCH

Anatomy of the health effects of the Mediterranean diet

Some food groups in the Mediterranean diet are more important than others in promoting health and longer life, according to new research published on bmj.com. Eating more vegetables, fruits, nuts, pulses, and olive oil, and drinking moderate amounts of alcohol, while not consuming much meat, is linked to people living longer. Several earlier studies have concluded that the Mediterranean diet improves chances of living longer, but this study is the first to investigate the importance of individual components of the diet.

Variation in antibiotic prescribing and its impact on recovery in patients with acute cough in primary care

Antibiotic prescribing for respiratory illnesses should be standardised across Europe to help reduce inappropriate prescribing and resistance, say experts in a study published on bmj.com. Antibiotic resistance is a major healthcare problem worldwide. Inappropriate antibiotic prescribing, particularly for respiratory illnesses, has been blamed for driving the problem. There is also good evidence that most antibiotic prescriptions do not help otherwise healthy patients with common respiratory tract infections to get better any quicker.

LATEST BLOGS



Richard Smith recalls his first days as a doctor, but it brings back painful and partially suppressed memories. He experienced his first death as a result of medical error on only his second day. He explains what happened and says, "Maybe this explains the rest of my career—as an editor and busybody, rather than practising doctor".

Joe Collier writes about the importance of using one's senses as a doctor. Not only do clinicians need to hone their already existing senses so that they can hear, feel, and see physical signs to help make their diagnosis, but they also need to "develop a capacity to sense more profoundly what patients really want to tell them."

Finally, Annabel Ferriman asks whether you have any questions for Margaret Chan, director general of the World Health Organization, before the journal interviews her. Domhnall MacAuley blogs on the potential hazards of clinical shared decision making from the 5th International Shared Decision Making Conference in Boston, and Harvey Marcovitch writes about censorship, squeamishness, and same sex desire.

Find out more at <http://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/>

Richard Lehman's journal blog is taking a short sabbatical from bmj.com to spend some time on doc2doc. In this week's blog he discusses H1N1 ("Is everybody dead yet?"), virtual colonoscopy (better than a "plastic eel"?), red yeast rice for hypercholesterolaemia, and Bill Gates. With donations of kidneys from living donors to unknown recipients up by 50% in the last year we ask would you donate a kidney to a stranger? The latest impact factors were published last week. The BMJ's is up, but how much do you care? Should doctors hoard Tamiflu for themselves and their families? You might think not, but it seems to be happening. The deadline for submitting tips for our ebook for newly qualified doctors is on Friday, so if you haven't posted yours yet do it now!



Last week's poll asked:

"Is medicine failing male patients?"

You voted: **Yes 119 (53%)**
No 104 (47%)

This week's poll asks:

"Is it acceptable for people to take methylphenidate to enhance performance?"

Submit your vote on bmj.com

MOST COMMENTED ON

Sharing of patients' data should not be based on implied consent, say GPs' representatives

MHRA label seems to be illegal

Self administered cognitive screening test (TYM) for detection of Alzheimer's disease

Early management of persistent non-specific low back pain: summary of NICE guidance

Science in court

MOST READ

Self administered cognitive screening test (TYM) for detection of Alzheimer's disease

Diagnosis of dementia

Advise use of rear facing child car seats for children under 4 years old

Early management of persistent non-specific low back pain: summary of NICE guidance



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