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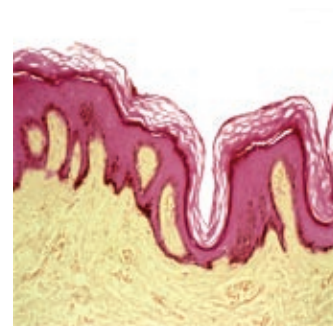
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STEVE G SCHMEISSER/SPL

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86 Filaggrin gene defects and risk of developing allergic sensitisation and allergic disorders: systematic review and meta-analysis

This review of 24 observational studies suggests that filaggrin is a robust biomarker for a wide range of common atopic conditions
Rosanne A H M van den Oord, Aziz Sheikh

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89 Overall and cancer related mortality among patients with ocular inflammation treated with immunosuppressive drugs: retrospective cohort study

Patients taking azathioprine, methotrexate, ciclosporin, dapsone, and systemic corticosteroids had no increased risk of overall or cancer mortality but this study confirmed the risks associated with TNF inhibitors

John H Kempen, Ebenezer Daniel, James P Dunn, C Stephen Foster, Sapna Gangaputra, Asaf Hanish, Kathy J Helzlsouer, Douglas A Jabs, R Oktay Kaçmaz, Grace A Levy-Clarke, Teresa L Liesegang, Craig W Newcomb, Robert B Nussenblatt, Siddharth S Pujari, James T Rosenbaum, Eric B Suhler, Jennifer E Thorne

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93 Household ownership and use of insecticide treated nets among target groups after implementation of a national voucher programme in the United Republic of Tanzania: plausibility study using three annual cross sectional household surveys

Uptake of insecticide treated nets increased significantly over two years but some of the poorest groups remained unprotected against malaria

Kara Hanson, Tanya Marchant, Rose Nathan, Hadji Mponda, Caroline Jones, Jane Bruce, Hassan Mshinda, Joanna Armstrong Schellenberg

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96 Recurrence up to 3.5 years after antibiotic treatment of acute otitis media in very young Dutch children: survey of trial participants

Parents reported that nearly two thirds of babies and toddlers who were randomised to antibiotic treatment had recurrent infection within three years, compared to less than half of the placebo group

Natália Bezáková, Roger A M J Damoiseaux, Arno W Hoes, Anne G M Schilder, Maroeska M Rovers

99 Association between mid-life marital status and cognitive function in later life: population based cohort study

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Among 1400 Finns followed for up to 21 years, those living in a couple relationship at mid-life had a reduced risk of cognitive impairment later in life

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Sarah J K Baker, John A H Wass

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Published weekly. US periodicals class postage paid at Rahway, NJ. Postmaster: send address changes to BMJ, c/o Mercury Airfreight International Ltd Inc, 365 Blair Road, Avenel, NJ 07001, USA. \$796. Weekly Printed by Precision Colour Printing Limited



JEFF MOORE/EMPICS/PA

PICTURE OF THE WEEK

An anti-tobacco campaigner, Stuart Holmes, briefly hijacked the vacant fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square, London, on Monday at the start of an artistic project by Antony Gormley. The One & Other project will give 2400 people each an hour of fame as a living sculpture—doing whatever they like as long as it's legal. Mr Holmes's banner read, "Save the children. Ban tobacco and actors smoking." See www.oneandother.co.uk.

THE WEEK IN NUMBERS

1 in 10 Proportion of Europeans and North Americans who have filaggrin gene defects (Research, p 86)

30% Proportion of the 12 million or so NHS hospital admissions a year that involve surgery (Feature, p 74)

2000 Extremely preterm births in England in 2006; 0.3% of all births (Clinical Review, p 100)

31 million Prescriptions for antidepressants written in the UK in 2006 (From the Front Line, p 112)

100 000 Estimated fewer hospital admissions a year in England if a unit of alcohol cost at least 50p (News, p 66)

THE WEEK IN QUOTES

"People living in a couple relationship at mid-life had a reduced risk of cognitive impairment later in life" (Research, p 99)

"NHS could learn about motivating staff from John Lewis stores" (News, p 67)

"Such vague and disparate symptoms make early intervention in the case of Addison's unlikely" (Practice, p 106)

"Most current safety interventions are an ethical, emotional, and insurance driven response to specific incidents in hospitals" (Analysis, p 82)

"[Chiropractic] welcomes examination of its methods, yet libellous statements are not the modus operandi that critics should employ" (Observations, p 78)

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Keep libel laws out of science



Editorials, p 57
Research, p 99

I hope all readers of the *BMJ* are signed up to organised scepticism. It's not a blog but it could be. It's one of the four principles of good science as articulated by Robert Merton nearly 70 years ago. The other three—communalism, universalism, and disinterestedness—are no less important, but I had to turn to Wikipedia to remind me what they were. Merton defined organised scepticism as the requirement that scientific claims be exposed to critical scrutiny before they are accepted.

This wasn't a new idea. Tony Delamothe reminds us (p 77) that the motto of the Royal Society translates as "Take nobody's word for it," showing its commitment "to withstand the domination of authority...and to verify all statements by an appeal to fact determined by experiment."

Longstanding and essential though it is, this principle is under serious threat. As Harvey Marcovitch explains (p 61), people whose scientific claims are questioned are turning to the law to attempt to silence their critics rather than engaging in open scientific debate. England's libel laws are particularly appealing to libel tourists around the world because they put the burden of proof on the defendant, who risks incurring huge costs. Marcovitch references several cases in which libel laws have been used to stifle scientific criticism, including the ongoing fight between science journalist Simon Singh and the British Chiropractic Association (BCA).

In an article in the *Guardian* last year, Singh made claims regarding the evidence base alleged to support the promotion of chiropractic treatments

in certain non-skeletal conditions in children. As Singh explains on the website senseaboutscience.org.uk, the *Guardian* offered the BCA an opportunity to lay out their evidence rather than to sue him for libel. The BCA opted to sue.

But in response to our recent editorial by Evan Harris (*BMJ* 2009;338:b2254), the vice president of the BCA Richard Brown, has now presented the evidence (p 78). He writes, "There is in fact substantial evidence for the BCA to have made claims that chiropractic can help various childhood conditions" and lists 18 references. Readers can decide for themselves whether or not they are convinced. Edzard Ernst is not (p 79). His demolition of the 18 references is, to my mind, complete.

Weak science sheltered from criticism by officious laws means bad medicine. Singh is determined to fight the lawsuit rather than apologise for an article he believes to be sound. He and his supporters have in their sights not only the defence of this case but the reform of England's libel laws. Despite the daunting odds, Marcovitch is cautiously optimistic about the future for medical science. A US judge recently dismissed a device manufacturer's lawsuit against a group of authors, concluding that the fight should take place "in the pages of the journal, not in court." And last year when chiropractors threatened to sue over an article in the *New Zealand Medical Journal*, its editor Frank Frizelle spoke for all of us when he asked them to provide "your evidence not your legal muscle."

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

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2009;339:b2783

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LATEST RESEARCH

Independent external validation and evaluation of QRISK cardiovascular risk prediction

According to this prospective open cohort study, the QRISK cardiovascular disease risk score offers an improvement over the long established Anderson Framingham equation in terms of identifying a high risk population for cardiovascular disease in the United Kingdom. The linked editorial says QRISK is better on every performance measure and should be recommended in the UK.

Health outcomes of youth development programme in England

A government backed pilot programme in England, that specifically aimed at sex and drugs education, did not reduce teenage pregnancies and other outcomes and might even have increased pregnancies, according to this prospective matched comparison study. An accompanying editorial suggests that programmes may be more effective when implemented by charismatic staff, when they facilitate access to reproductive health services, when the staff



connect with the teenage participants, or when the staff give a strong clear message about avoiding unprotected sex.

Read these and other research articles at <http://www.bmj.com/channels/research.dtl>

LATEST BLOGS

Doc2doc's Tom Nolan looks at "the science bit" and plays the flu pandemic game in his daily swine flu blog: "Although news might be a bit thin on the ground, people with symptoms aren't. But are GPs coping?" Reviewing the information sources that are available he concludes that the message to GPs seems clear.

Meanwhile, guest blogger Richard Smith reflects on doing the right thing, albeit at a snail's pace: "One of the things about being an 'old guy' is that you realise how extraordinarily slow we are at doing the right thing. You also see wheels being constantly reinvented." And guest blogger Joe Collier wonders whether being arrogant is such a bad thing: "While this set of definitions paints a picture of people who are unsavoury, is there another side to the story? Can aspects of arrogant behaviour be normal, defensible, and in some circumstances a necessary (probably an essential) part of conduct? Does this sort of label matter and anyway, who decides? Is it time for a rethink?" A commentator thinks that it's all about definitions: "What you describe isn't arrogance to me. The definition I hold to is along the lines that an arrogant person rejects what someone says without looking into (or even ignoring) whether it's correct or not, and makes fun of people."

Read these and other blogs, and submit your comments, at <http://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/>



Last week's poll asked:

"Would you recommend your patients, family, or friends to attend breast screening?"

You voted: **Yes 292 (85%)**
No 53 (15%)

This week's poll asks:

"Have you changed your behaviour as a result of swine flu?"

Submit your vote on bmj.com



MOST READ

The benefits of statins in people without established cardiovascular disease but with cardiovascular risk factors: meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials

Self administered cognitive screening test (TYM) for detection of Alzheimer's disease: cross sectional study

Anatomy of health effects of Mediterranean diet: Greek EPIC prospective cohort study

Managing hepatitis C virus infection
Less medicine is more

MOST COMMENTED ON

The benefits of statins in people without established cardiovascular disease but with cardiovascular risk factors

Less medicine is more

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

Vaccine disputes

Sri Lanka: health as a weapon of war?

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