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RESEARCH

729 **Radial extracorporeal shockwave treatment compared with supervised exercises in patients with subacromial pain syndrome: single blind randomised study**

Attending a couple of weekly exercise sessions for up to 12 weeks was significantly more effective than up to six weeks' shockwave treatment for short term improvement of shoulder pain and disability index score among Norwegian adults

Kaia Engebretsen, Margreth Grotle, Erik Bautz-Holter, Leiv Sandvik, Niels G Juel, Ole Marius Ekeberg, Jens Ivar Brox

732 **Use of qualitative methods alongside randomised controlled trials of complex healthcare interventions: methodological study**

In a systematic sample of 100 trials published in English, a third were accompanied by qualitative studies, but these were often poorly integrated with the trials and often had major methodological shortcomings

Simon Lewin, Claire Glenton, Andrew D Oxman

735 **Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors in pregnancy and congenital malformations: population based cohort study**

Septal heart defects were more prevalent among children whose mothers were prescribed an SSRI in early pregnancy in Denmark, particularly those exposed to sertraline, citalopram, or more than one type of SSRI

Lars Henning Pedersen, Tine Brink Henriksen, Mogens Vestergaard, Jørn Olsen, Bodil Hammer Bech

» Editorial, p 703

736 **High circumference and risk of heart disease and premature death: prospective cohort study**

Smaller thigh circumference was independently related to death and cardiovascular and coronary heart diseases for men and to death for women in this Danish study, with a threshold effect below around 60 cm

Berit L Heitmann, Peder Frederiksen

» Editorial, p 704

RESEARCH METHODS AND REPORTING

737 **Critical reflections on the rise of qualitative research**

Sixteen years ago Catherine Pope and Nicholas Mays were arguing for greater use of qualitative techniques in health research. Now they are concerned that the methods aren't always used appropriately

Catherine Pope, Nicholas Mays

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740 **Surgery for obesity in adulthood**

Daniel Richard Leff, Dugal Heath

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Geoff Norman, Kevin Barraclough, Lisa Dolovich, David Price

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The Editor, BMJ

BMA House, Tavistock Square,
London WC1H 9JR

Email: editor@bmj.com

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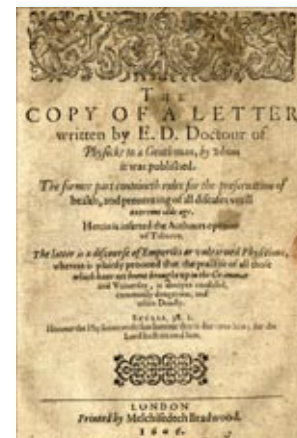
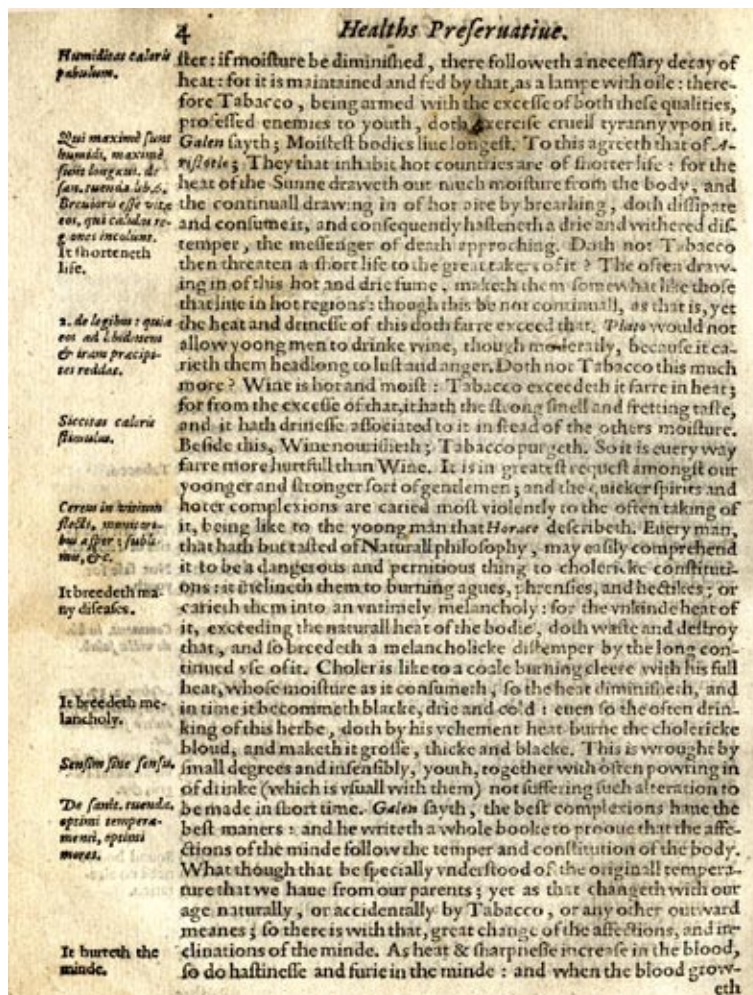
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PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Library staff at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh have found a 17th century letter highlighting the dangers of smoking in young people. The letter, written in 1606 by Dr Eleazar Duncon, says that tobacco is "hurtfull and dangerous to youth."

THE WEEK IN NUMBERS

£24 000 Yearly cost of a place in a care home (Editorial, p 708)

50% Proportion of India's 150 million children under 6 who are underweight (News, p 714)

220 000 Number of immigrants likely to become British citizens in 2009 (Observations, p 724)

2.0 Odds ratio of septal heart defects among children whose mothers took a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor in early pregnancy (Research, p 735)

0.28% Risk of death from all types of bariatric surgery (Clinical review, p 740)

THE WEEK IN QUOTES

"The current [US] healthcare system is in crisis and is not sustainable in the future" (News, p 711)

"In 2004, the government's exercise to assess security threats had identified flu as a greater risk than terrorism" (Feature, p 720)

"Smaller thigh size is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular morbidity and early mortality" (Research, p 736)

"Most isolated vertigo is due to benign positional vertigo or acute vestibular neuritis" (Practice, p 749)

"An axe can be useful—it just depends on who wields it" (From the frontline, p 756)

EDITOR'S CHOICE

When necessity becomes opportunity



ANNE CUTTING/ALAMY

Practice, p 749

President Obama's healthcare reforms continue their slow passage through stormy waters. Will the open letter to Congress signed by 400 prominent doctors and academics give him sufficient boost to push them through (p 711)? Unlikely, I think, but we can always hope. Lack of health insurance is taking a huge toll on America's health, according to researchers at Harvard University, who found an excess 45 000 deaths a year among uninsured adults even after adjusting for socioeconomic confounders (p 715).

The letter calls for urgent reform to prevent America's current healthcare crisis turning into a catastrophe. Its recommendations echo Obama's plan. But there are people at both ends of the political spectrum who feel betrayed. One of the Harvard researchers calls Obama's "public option," which offers less expensive insurance to those who are currently uninsured, a "pitiful gesture at what ought to be done, which is a national healthcare plan." Meanwhile, those with a vested interest in the status quo have been tapping into America's horror of anything that sounds like socialism. The open letter to Congress, and another to Senator Kerry from prominent UK doctors (*BMJ* 2009;339:b3768), both try to put the record straight—no death panels, no age discrimination, no reduced access to the doctor of your choice—but the damage to the NHS's reputation around the world may have been done.

I'm not the first to have said it, but it's surely time for both countries to stop peering at each other and to start looking elsewhere for models of health care. One place to start might be the European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies. It aims to help countries learn from each

other's experience of implementing healthcare reform. It also brings together ministers and health researchers in the hope of promoting evidence based policy making. As Tessa Richards discovered, the UK is not yet on its growing list of governmental partners (p 722).

As an example of what can be learnt from looking to Europe, Harald Schmidt and colleagues describe Germany's health incentives scheme (p 725). Since 1989, Germans have been offered reduced copayments for dental treatment if they attend regular checkups, and there's now a range of incentives for participating in prevention schemes. The initial evidence suggests clear potential for cost saving, say the authors. But they warn that however effective they are, the schemes mustn't compromise the social solidarity underlying Germany's health system.

The UK's social solidarity will be severely tested in the coming years with the fallout from the economic crisis and a rapidly ageing population. Which makes it all the more important to debate proposals for a national social care service. This could smooth out variations in access and availability inherent in the current localised system, says Christina Victor (p 708). But how will we afford it, especially if the NHS escapes the worst of the cuts as is currently politically expedient? Des Spence warns that sparing the NHS will only fuel resentment from other public sectors (p 756). "The time has come to rationalise, consolidate, prioritise" he says. No doubt all countries think they are good at turning necessity into opportunity. Now's our chance to prove it.

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

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PLUS

Career Focus, jobs, and courses appear after p 756

Last week's poll asked:**Is population stabilisation crucial to tackling climate change?****You voted:****Yes: 277 (79%) No: 72 (21%)****This week's poll asks:****Should under 5s be allowed to touch animals at petting farms?****Go to bmj.com to vote****LATEST BLOGS**

Joe Collier writes about how being a teetotaler affects his life. For the most part it does not cause him many problems, but what bugs him is, "how society so often tries to paint me as someone with something wrong, as an object of suspicion, as an outsider ripe for enquiry." He asks, "Could it be that we teetotalers represent some sort of threat, a challenge to a way of life that now passes for normal and in which some can see no alternative?"

Louise Kenny continues to keep us up to date with her adventures as a doctor in Guatemala. This week she writes about the case of a 38 year old male who presented initially with sudden onset pain, and went on to rapidly, over days, develop an ulcerating, sloughy, necrotic sore of the left upper arm. She has provided photos and left the blog open to suggestions about the possible diagnosis.

Elsewhere Helen Macdonald reviews the recent Panorama programme about H1N1 flu.

Join these debates and others at blogs.bmj.com/bmj/

WHAT'S NEW ON BMJ.COM**LATEST RESEARCH**

Physical interventions to interrupt or reduce the spread of respiratory viruses: Washing hands, wearing masks and isolating potentially infected patients are highly effective in preventing the spread of viral infections and should be given higher priority in national pandemic preparation plans, argue researchers in this systematic review. More resources should be invested into studying which physical interventions are the most effective in minimising the impact of acute respiratory tract infections.

In our podcast this week, we talk to Tom Jefferson, the Cochrane Vaccines Field coordinator, who tells us about this latest research into the efficacy of physical barriers in preventing the spread of respiratory viruses.

See this and other research papers at bmj.com/research.dtl



Until now, medicine has been at war against disease, says doc2doc blogger Dionysus.

Referencing Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, he asks whether eternal youth is now the holy grail of medical science. In his weekly blog highlighting

latest research, Richard Lehman looks to a *New England Journal of Medicine* paper that aims to establish why some fat people avoid getting diabetes. Also, does co-prescribing of proton pump inhibitors affect the clinical efficacy of clopidogrel? And finally, does a daily read of UK newspaper *The Daily Mail* instil the belief that the entire population views doctors as incompetent, idiotic, and vastly overpaid?

Join the debates at doc2doc.bmj.com

**MOST READ**

Comparisons between geographies of mortality and deprivation from the 1900s and 2001

Life expectancy in relation to cardiovascular risk factors: 38 year follow-up of 19 000 men in the Whitehall study

Thigh circumference and risk of heart disease and premature death: prospective cohort study

Metformin associated lactic acidosis

Should healthcare workers have the swine flu vaccine?

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