



Padre Reverend Richard Rowe, Royal Navy, with his communion loaf, Role 3 Hospital, Camp Bastion
 • IN LOVE AND WAR, p 16



CONTENTS

EDITORIALS

- 1 How 21st century capitalism is failing us
- 2 Imbalance of power between patients and doctors
- 3 Making music in the operating theatre
- 4 *The BMJ's* Christmas Appeal

GOING TO EXTREMES

- 5 Captain Webb's legacy: the perils of swimming the English Channel
- 8 The Darwin Awards: sex differences in idiotic behaviour
- 10 Cross sectional study of political affiliation and physical activity
- 12 Effect of vitamin D₃ supplementation on adverse effects of earthquakes
- 14 Against the odds in Las Vegas

IN LOVE AND WAR

- 16 The secret lives of the Bastion Bakers
- 18 Guerrillas in the mist: how I met a Colombian rebel leader
- 20 Righteous Among the Nations: doctors and medical students
- 22 Don't look away now

MEDIA STUDIES

- 24 Televised medical talk shows—what's their evidence?
- 26 CARTOONS KILL
- 28 Transmissibility of the Ice Bucket Challenge among globally influential celebrities
- 30 Healer, dealer, heart stealer: portrayals of the doctor in popular music
- 32 Doctors: caring extroverts or self deluded chocoholics?

GASTROENTEROLOGICAL TRACTS

- 34 Are some diets "mass murder"?
- 37 When somebody loses weight, where does the fat go?

ON THE WARDS, IN THE SURGERY

- 39 Medical training: forgotten common competences
- 40 Why are magazines in practice waiting rooms so old?
- 42 The King Canute GP appointment system
- 44 Operating theatre time, where does it all go? A prospective observational study
- 46 Utility of Hippocrates' prognostic aphorism to predict death in the modern era
- 48 Medical eponyms: taxonomies, natural history, and the evidence

FOUND IN TRANSLATION

- 50 Acronyms: qualitative and quantitative systematic study
- 52 Use of Google Translate in medical communication
- 53 English as she is mis-spoke, misread, and miswrote

DIGITAL HIGHLIGHTS

- 54 Bonus Christmas articles, and more

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Without frontiers

Not only are orthopaedic surgeons stronger and smarter than anaesthetists, they're also better at telling the time



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Forget borders. This year's Christmas issue goes wherever our fancy took us.

First off, discover the most common reasons why swimmers abandon their attempt to swim the English Channel (p 5). Then ditch the Speedos and Vaseline and travel with us to places as varied as Las Vegas (p 14); Camp Bastion, Afghanistan (p 16); and earthquake shattered Christchurch, New Zealand (p 12). (Pack some yeast but leave your vitamin D behind.)

Witness the slow death of idealism in the Colombian jungle (p 18) and dazzle friends by knowing the origin of the term "armchair socialist" (p 10). Read Nigel Hawkes's distillation of the responses of the first 50 subjects of BMJ Confidential (p 32). And catch up, if you must, with the friendship circles of "global influential celebrities" (p 28).

As always, there's some serious material to counterbalance the fluff. At our request, Richard Smith digested some of the recent crop of diet books. He concluded that "bold policies have been based on fragile science, and the long term results may be terrible" (p 34). The scientific basis for reducing dietary fat may be even less secure than that for the recommendations made on a range of medical topics on television talk shows (p 24). Half of these either have no evidence or are contradicted by the best available evidence.

Erudite accounts are provided of the medical -nyms, both epo- and acro-. Jeffrey Aronson discusses medical eponyms, their classification and natural history (p 48). Thomas Gordon Campbell and Robert Trachter coin a new eponymous syndrome (p 49) and D Mark Chaput de Saintonge a new eponymous sign (p 47).

Anton Pottegård and colleagues shine a light on medical acronyms, adding an assessment of

their quality (p 50). Too late to be included in their assessment was the acronymically entitled CARTOONS KILL, a study of children's animated cartoons that shows that their first few minutes can be scarier than *Psycho* (p 26). If you care about words, you'll wince at how the English language can be mangled both by humans (p 53) and by a web based translation tool (p 52).

Too much novelty? We have further episodes of two long running Christmas sagas. The battle of the sexes goes another round with an examination of male idiot theory (which states that men are idiots and idiots do stupid things) (p 8). And Elizabeth Travis and colleagues assemble yet more evidence for the overweening superiority of the orthopaedic surgeon. Not only are they stronger and smarter than anaesthetists, they're also better at telling the time (p 44).

Be sure to check the digital highlights page (p 54) for bonus online articles. There, you'll find the fourth Christmas article we're publishing this year from New Zealand, taking the country to the top of the table of Christmas papers per head of population.

The highlights page also includes a reminder to let us know what music you like to play while operating (p 3) and whether your hospital is providing meals for on-call staff on Christmas Day (p 38).

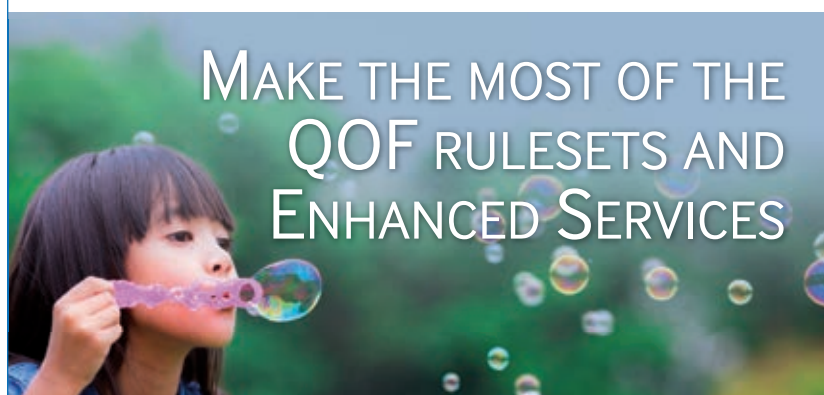
Most important of all: please don't forget to dig deep for this year's charity, Médecins Sans Frontières (p 4). It's a pity this worthy charity has already nabbed that name: it would have made a great cover line for this year's Christmas issue.

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Cite this as: *BMJ* 2014;349:g7696

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