

TO THE EDITOR: Dugdale recently suggested that people who develop skin reactions to mosquito bites may be protected against Ross River virus (RRV) disease.<sup>1</sup> He noted that seven patients with a history of RRV disease all reported no skin reaction to mosquito bites, and 18 patients with no past history of RRV disease reported reacting to such bites. We argue that this correlation is entirely to be expected, as the lack of reaction to mosquito bites illustrates that the individuals have been previously exposed to many bites. At least two studies have shown a clear inverse correlation between mosquito exposure and bite reactions.<sup>2,3</sup> Clearly, exposure to a large number of mosquito bites increases the risk of infection.<sup>4</sup> Thus, a reaction to mosquito bites probably does not protect against RRV disease, but is simply a marker for low exposure to mosquito bites and therefore low risk of RRV infection.

The rationale behind the association of itching bites and protection against RRV infection is also tenuous. Virus is likely to reach the circulation within seconds of introduction by the mosquito, whereas allergic reactions take minutes to develop. It is unlikely that a local reaction will affect viral replication at distant sites.

In Dugdale's study, only people with a history of symptomatic RRV disease had undergone RRV serological testing.

## Improving doctors' letters

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TO THE EDITOR: I support Tattersall and colleagues<sup>1</sup> in their attempt to use a wee bit of science and a dose of common sense to improve doctors' letters. While I would love to receive letters based on their proposed "prompt sheet", and should really try much harder myself to follow it, I'd be only too pleased — in the interim, while we await enlightenment — to receive *any letter* from some of my colleagues with whom I share what is supposed to be "multidisciplinary care" of patients. There is a research project in this for the brave to find out why, too often, communication is not merely inadequate but non-existent.

1. Tattersall MHN, Butow PN, Brown JE, Thompson JF. Improving doctors' letters. *Med J Aust* 2002; 177: 516-520. □

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*The Medical Journal of Australia (MJA)* is published on the 1st and 3rd Monday of each month by the Australasian Medical Publishing Company Proprietary Limited, Level 2, 26-32 Pyrmont Bridge Rd, Pyrmont, NSW 2009. ABN 20 000 005 854. Telephone: (02) 9562 6666. Fax: (02) 9562 6699. E-mail: ampc@ampco.com.au. The Journal is printed by Offset Alpine Printing Ltd, 42 Boorea St, Lidcombe, NSW 2141.

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27,787 circulation as at  
30 September, 2002



ISSN 0025-729X