

## IN THIS ISSUE

### Dialling drivers

Although the jury is still out on the health effects of mobile phones, it's well known that using a handheld phone while driving a car increases the chance of having an accident. How many communication junkies take the risk? Taylor et al (*page 140*) took to the streets of Melbourne to find out.

### The heart of the matter

Mortality from cardiovascular disease (CVD) is three times higher among Indigenous Australians than the rest of the population. The Perth Aboriginal Atherosclerosis Risk Study is a community based project which seeks to identify people who are at high risk of developing CVD, so that they can access treatment for their risk factors. The initial findings of the study (Thompson et al, *page 143*) confirm the worth of the project, but the real work is yet to come.

### The future of disability

Francis Bacon might have believed that "dreams and predictions ought to serve but for winter talk by the fireside" but we do need a bit of foresight to plan for the care of our ageing population. Enter Giles et al (*page 130*) who have used the 1998 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers to calculate projections for the prevalence and nature of disability in older Australians over the next 30 years.

### Who should take aspirin?

When it comes to the use of aspirin to prevent cardiovascular disease, look no further than the position statement from the National Heart Foundation (Hung, *page 147*).

### Wrong end of the needle

In the early hours of the morning a staff member in a busy intensive care unit sustains a needlestick injury. A series of delays and an administrative error mean that HIV exposure prophylaxis, although indicated, is not given for almost four days. Is this Murphy's law or a system failure? Cooper and Blamey (*page 162*) describe how the incident changed practice in their health service.

Hepatitis C is much more prevalent than HIV infection in the community; the figures derived by Charles et al on the number of healthcare workers potentially exposed in Victoria might surprise you (*page 153*). Having identified a significant problem, they propose a protocol for dealing with hepatitis C exposure from needlestick injuries.



### Sex in the lucky country

Two articles in this issue draw attention to deficiencies in sexual and reproductive health services in Australia, compared with other developed nations.

According to Skinner and Hickey (*page 158*) our high rates of teenage birth and abortion tell a story of ill-met sexual health needs. They outline some strategies for improvement.

Youth is also the time of highest risk for genital chlamydial infection, which is now four times more prevalent than it was a decade ago. Testing is patchy and there are many myths regarding who is likely to be infected, say Chen and Donovan (*page 124*). Those hoping for increased fertility rates in Australia would do well to invest in screening for this disease.

### Take the pressure down

Most people will be *au fait* with the reasons for treating high blood pressure. So is untreated hypertension still a problem in Australia? Briganti and colleagues (*page 135*) consulted the AusDiab study, which is yielding useful national data about more than just diabetes.

### High-tech cancer detector

Helical CT scanning is fast, sensitive, safe, and has been mooted by some as the way forward to detect lung cancer at an earlier, operable stage. So should Australia be investing buckets of money in this new technology? Elwood and colleagues from the National Cancer Control Initiative Working Group on Lung Cancer Screening give their recommendations (*page 125*).

### Great promise

If the postman is good to us, this issue may well reach you on Jeans for Genes Day (August 1). It's the 10th anniversary of the day and, according to Weisbrot and Breen (*page 127*) Australians remain optimistic about the potential benefits of genetic research. They walk us through the highlights of a recently released report on the ethical, legal and social implications of genetic technology in Australia.

Neurologists are now called upon to use genetic testing to predict and confirm diagnoses. As our series on **The New Genetics** continues (*page 167*), McCusker uses the example of Huntington disease to illustrate the medical specialist's role in managing genetic disorders.

Another source of public optimism is stem cell therapy. Byrne and Howells outline some of what has been achieved in this area on *page 164*, but caution that it will be a long way **From Bench to Bedside**.

### Another time . . . another place . . .

*Stay humble. Always answer the phone — no matter who else is in the car.*

*Jack Lemmon (1925-2001)*