

IN THIS ISSUE

Complicated compensation

Following her husband's death from colon cancer, a prison officer's wife claimed and was awarded workers' compensation on the basis that work stress had contributed to his developing the disease. In strictly medical terms this doesn't make sense — there is no proof that stress causes cancer. However, as Spigelman and Dwyer explain (page 339), "evidence" in the adversarial legal system is poles apart from the usual medical definition! Niselle (page 341) says a better way to handle such claims is to use medical panels that flush out and contextualise all relevant information.

Dial-a-Cas

As any parent (and doctor) knows, children don't always fall ill between nine and five, and it's not always easy to tell how serious the illness is. What if they had access to phone advice from experienced paediatric nurses in such situations? Kidsnet (run by the Children's Hospital at Westmead) is one such service. Read about its enormous popularity on page 333.

The Footy Show

Mention football and most will think scandal, wealth and adulation, not just the game. The Football Australasia conference, held during last year's AFL grand final week, also linked football with injuries and controversies over injury management. Seward et al (page 321) describe the practical and research issues that were raised, from career-ending injuries to autologous chondrocyte implants.

Noisy breathing

We've heard the adage that all that wheezes is not asthma. This issue's *Lessons from Practice* (Spencer et al, page 347) adds that all breathing that's noisy isn't necessarily wheezing either...

Stirring obstetrics

A previous *MJA* article — "Evidence-based obstetrics in Australia: can we put away the wooden spoon?" (*Med J Aust* 2001; 174: 588-589) — recounted the discipline's admirable pursuit of best evidence and the pitfalls of doing so. In this issue, Giles et al (page 328) report how obstetricians manage women who are (potentially) infected with blood-borne viruses. Does the wooden spoon still dangle overhead?



The 'W' word

Workforce planning is the subject of two articles reflecting current concerns about our shortage of doctors, particularly rural ones. Kamien's editorial (page 318) describes two recent groundbreaking reports with a practical blueprint for viable rural general practice. The *Viewpoint* by Joyce and colleagues (page 343) argues that much of our current approach is piecemeal and narrow, proposing a more global "systems perspective".

The Untouchables?

A controversial editorial by Peters and colleagues (page 317) challenges us to consider whether smokers should be denied certain elective surgical procedures. The premise is simple: apart from the well known cardiorespiratory risks, smokers have higher rates of wound infection, thus incurring higher healthcare and personal costs. But what are the other issues to consider in such a discriminatory policy?

Riding on the sheep's back

As part of the *MJA*'s evidence-based drive to boost Australian industry and export earnings, we publish a randomised controlled trial of a high-performance Australian medical sheepskin. Introduced by the CSIRO with certain technical specifications in 1998, the sheepskin was assessed for its effectiveness in preventing pressure ulcers. Jolley and colleagues shear — sorry, share — the good news on page 324.

Stacey's editorial (page 316) reminds us that the answer doesn't lie in any one item. Instead, let's avoid any dyed-in-the-wool habits that don't include active institution-wide prevention, adequate staffing and pressure-relieving devices.

Anything but osteoporosis

From the barrage of information on osteoporosis that's bombarded us in recent years, anyone might be forgiven for forgetting that other bone disorders do exist. We asked Prince and Glendenning to redress the balance in their instalment of *MJA Practice Essentials: Endocrinology* (page 354).

Another time ... another place ...

What of the allegedly indisputable nature of the evidence on which so much of the so-called scientific medicine is based? On close inspection, much of that turns out to be disputable and even undependable. In a word, uncertain.

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