

LOOK TO THE RIGHT ...

In honour of “Walk Safely to School Day” (1 April), we spare a thought this issue for the Australian kids who are trying to navigate the proliferation of complex roadways that traverse our cities and towns. On page 318, Cross and Hall consider some of the behavioural strategies that have been found to improve children’s safety as pedestrians.

MND HOPE

This week (3–9 April) is Motor Neurone Disease Awareness week. To mark the occasion, Kiernan (page 319) is the bearer of a rare piece of good news for sufferers.

DENIED BEST TREATMENT?

There are now clear and well-publicised indications for certain drugs, investigations and interventions after patients present with acute coronary syndromes, but several Australian studies over the past few years have shown that this advice is not always adhered to. Using data from the Queensland Health Cardiac Collaborative Registry, Scott et al (page 325) have tried to determine just where and why the gaps in care occur in their state.

According to Talbot et al (page 344) many obese patients are also missing out on treatment. While bariatric surgery is covered by Medicare, and is recommended for selected patients with morbid obesity (NHMRC guidelines), it is virtually impossible to access it in a public hospital. This makes little sense economically and raises issues of equity, say the authors.

On a much larger scale, at last year’s World Congress of Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics, which was held in Brisbane, a major theme was global equity of access to medicines. Day and colleagues were there, and report on the highlights on page 322.

OTC BUT NOT RISK FREE

Another item to add to your checklist of advice to pregnant patients might be to go easy on the antacids. On the back of a convincing cautionary tale, Gordon et al (page 350) suggest more advice to and monitoring of women who might be purchasing these medications over the counter, unaware of the possible adverse effects.



AUSTRALIANS AFTER THE WAVE

Four days after a tsunami devastated much of the Indian Ocean region, a team of Australian health professionals travelled to the Maldives to assist with the medical and public health response. As Robertson et al explain (page 340), it is unusual for Australia to deploy civilian teams to disaster areas and, while the Australian and Maldivian collaboration was very successful, the experience has provided lessons for future such efforts.

In Banda Aceh the problems were similar, but on a larger scale. Visiting Australian doctors like Allworth (Letters, page 364) had to treat very sick patients without access to basic diagnostic facilities, nursing assistance or clinical records. A number of patients with recalcitrant respiratory infections a month after immersion in the tsunami waters prompted further investigation and treatment, and this letter to the MJA.

SIDE-ORDER SURGERY?

In his 30 years as a general practitioner–surgeon, Wilson has operated on many patients who elected to have more than one minor procedure under a single anaesthetic. His pragmatic report and subsequent discussion (page 337) pose an important question for an increasingly subspecialised profession. Is there still a role for this multitasking approach and, if so, who is trained and willing to fill it? In a linked editorial, Bruening and Maddern (page 317) explore the possible comeback of the general surgeon.

BABY TALK

The English novelist Nick Hornby has written and spoken of receiving a diagnosis of autism for your child — no matter how you dress it up, it’s very bad news. And by the time many parents receive this news they have endured years of uncertainty and, sometimes, a delay in effective intervention. How can we ensure that children with language problems are detected and treated early? Wray et al bring their expertise to our MJA Practice Essentials – Paediatrics series on page 354.

ANOTHER TIME ... ANOTHER PLACE

Fingers replace brains, and handicraft outruns science.

Archibald EW. Higher degrees in the profession of surgery. *Ann Surg* 1935; 102: 481-495. [481]