



STOPPING THE JUGGERNAUT

Recently, in his regular column, our Editor wondered where all Australia's "obesity champions" were. In this issue's lead editorial (*page 187*), Zimmet and James take up the champion challenge, urging all medical leaders to use their influence to force the fat cats in Canberra to give obesity the urgent attention it deserves.

INVESTMENT REPORTS

In its 40-year history, the National Heart Foundation of Australia (NHF) has contributed more than \$170 million to cardiovascular research. In terms of returns on investment, how has the NHF performed? Clay et al present the results of a recent evaluation on *page 209*.

As health care becomes more complex and expensive, there are calls for the government to increase its investment. But the money will only be well spent if we step back and consider the bigger picture, says Scott (*page 213*). No one will profit if medicine loses the plot.

SNEEZE, WHEEZE, SCRATCH ...

The constellation of images on this issue's front cover should give you a clue to the topic of our new *Practice Essentials* series. Sufferers and doctors know that allergy is not trivial. Series editors Kemp, Mullins and Weiner remind us in their introductory editorial that it also still seems to be increasing in Australia, with new problems continually being recognised (*page 226*). In the first article of the series, Douglass and O'Hehir provide the basics for diagnosing, preventing and treating allergic disease (*page 228*) — and don't miss Weiner's single page *Focus* (a trademark of this series) on allergen injection immunotherapy (*page 234*).

NOT IN VEIN

Non-surgical techniques for treating varicose veins are increasingly replacing the time-honoured procedures of surgical ligation and stripping. In 2002, Myers and colleagues adopted a new technique for treating saphenous vein reflux — endovenous laser therapy (in which the vein is thermally ablated by a laser under ultrasound guidance). They present their early results on *page 199*.

DELIVERING VITAMIN D

The poor vitamin D nutritional status of many aged-care residents is well known, as is the difficulty of delivering effective supplements. Recently, Wigg et al assessed the feasibility of using a new oral vitamin D preparation for aged-care residents in South Australia. They present the results of their prospective, controlled trial on *page 195*.

UNIVERSAL CALL

Although the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists recommends that HIV screening be offered to all pregnant women, the national policy devised by the former Australian National Council on AIDS and Related Diseases adopts a risk-based approach. With the policy currently under review, Giles et al (*page 217*) use the Wilson and Jungner criteria for population-based screening programs to make the argument for universal screening.

PREPARING FOR PANDEMIC

If there is an avian influenza pandemic, say Cameron et al, one of the most important fronts for limiting its spread will be hospitals. On *page 189*, these authors draw lessons for hospital infection control and other strategic measures from their experience with controlling the SARS outbreak.

NO-FAULT FAULTS

In contrast to Australia's medical indemnity arrangements, New Zealand has a no-fault compensation system for patients who are injured while undergoing medical treatment. The ultimate goal of any such system is to deliver compensation to those who are eligible. The New Zealand Quality of Healthcare Study, published in 2002, provided Bismark et al with an opportunity to match patients with potentially compensable events with those who actually claimed (*page 203*), revealing similar gaps to those that exist elsewhere.

FAILING FAILURE PATIENTS?

About one in five people who have an acute myocardial infarction (AMI) will experience some degree of heart failure in the days following the event, and these patients have a much poorer prognosis. The benefits of taking ACE inhibitors and β -blockers after AMI have been established but, as Krum et al found in a multicentre Australian survey, this vulnerable group of patients may be missing out (*page 191*).

CURRY, ANYONE?

Besides making food taste better, herbs and spices have been touted over the years as preventing everything from the common cold to depression, cancer, arthritis and infertility! The supplement included with this issue examines the evidence for some of these effects, as well as providing some interesting history, a bit of a culinary guide, and a look at how we might view herbs and spices in the future. Enjoy!

ANOTHER TIME ... ANOTHER PLACE

Some men also have strange antipathies in their natures against that sort of food which others love and live upon. I have read of one that could not endure to eat either bread or flesh; of another that fell into a swooning fit at the smell of a rose. ... There are some who, if a cat accidentally come into the room, though they neither see it, nor are told of it, will presently be in a sweat, and ready to die away.

Increase Mather, 1639–1723