

The BMJ questions e-cigarettes endorsement

The BMJ has questioned the decision by Public Health England — (mission statement: “We protect and improve the nation’s health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities”) — to endorse the use of e-cigarettes as an aid to quitting smoking. In a report released at the end of August PHE concluded that e-cigs were “95% less harmful” than conventional cigarettes and described them as a potential “game changer” in tobacco control. In *The BMJ* Professor Martin McKee and Professor Simon Capewell said the available evidence, including a recent Cochrane review, did not show clearly that e-cigs were as effective as established quitting aids. “We might also expect that the prominently featured ‘95% less harmful’ figure was based on a detailed review of evidence, supplemented by modelling”, wrote McKee and Capewell. “In fact, it comes from a single [sponsored] meeting of 12 people.” The sponsors included a CEO with previous funding from British American Tobacco. One of the 12 was a chief scientific advisor with declared funding from an e-cigarette manufacturer, and Philip Morris International. “None of these links or limitations are discussed in the PHE report”, McKee and Capewell wrote.



Dramatic rise in antibiotic use globally

Nature reports that “antibiotic use is growing steadily worldwide, driven mainly by rising demand in low- and middle-income countries”, citing the latest report from the Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy. The organisation used a review of data from scientific literature, and national and regional surveillance systems to calculate and map the rate of antibiotic resistance for 12 types of bacteria in 39 countries, and trends in antibiotic use in 69 countries over the past 10 years or longer. “Global antibiotic consumption grew by 30% between 2000 and 2010. This growth is driven mostly by countries such as South Africa and India, where antibiotics are widely available over the counter and sanitation in some areas is poor.” The report also found that the use of antibiotics in livestock is growing worldwide, particularly in China, which used about 15 000 tonnes of antibiotics for this purpose in 2010, and is projected to double its consumption by 2030.



Child mortality under six million for first time

A new **World Health Organization** report says deaths among children aged 5 years and under worldwide have more than halved over the last 25 years, falling from 12.7 million a year in 1990 to 5.9 million in 2015. “While progress has been substantial, a 53% drop in child mortality is far short of the Millennium Development Goal, where countries agreed to reduce child mortality between 1990 and 2015 by two-thirds.” Around 16 000 children under 5 still die every day, most from diseases that are readily preventable or treatable, says the report. Around 50% of global deaths among the under 5s occur in sub-Saharan Africa, while 30% occur in southern Asia. Approximately 45% of deaths among the under 5s occur in the first 28 days of life. One million infants die on the day they are born, and nearly 2 million during the first week following birth. Leading causes of death in this group include complications during labour, premature birth, pneumonia, sepsis, diarrhea and malaria. Most of the remaining deaths among the under 5s are tied to undernutrition.

Static electricity next frontline in malaria control

Dutch researchers have come up with a way of improving the efficacy of mosquito nets using static electricity, according to a report in *The Economist*. With the WHO reporting a 60% drop in deaths caused by malaria since 2000, In2Care, a Dutch mosquito-control firm, is finding a way to deliver insecticides embedded in mosquito nets more effectively to the target insect. “Current mosquito nets are woven from fibres impregnated throughout with an insecticide”, *The Economist* reports. “This permits them to be washed and used for years without loss of potency. But it also means this potency is not as great as it could be, because the insecticide is released only slowly by the fibres. Using static electricity, by contrast, means all of the insecticide is held on the surface of a net’s fibres. Much larger doses can thus be transferred to an insect which blunders into the net. In addition, a wide range of insecticides — and even, possibly, the spores of a fungus harmless to people but lethal to mosquitoes — can be applied to the fibres.”



Cate Swannell doi:10.5694/mja15.n1005



A migrant with bandaged feet rests inside an improvised shelter in the underground car park of a train station in Salzburg, Austria. Even as Germany announced it was reimposing border controls in a bid to slow the influx of migrants, Austria, through which already tens of thousands of people have passed on their way to Germany, has received a record number of arrivals. More than a week after the two countries threw open their borders to the migrants, Germany said it was reversing course as a temporary measure.

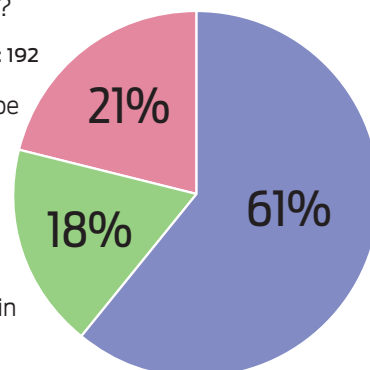
Picture: Dominic Ebenbichler/Reuters/Picture Media

MJA InSight Poll

Are you concerned about the use of potentially carcinogenic herbicides on genetically modified crops?

Total respondents: 192

- Yes – it must be a health risk
- Maybe – the research is not clear
- No – safety measures are in place



Take part in next week's poll on: www.mja.com.au/insight

MJA Podcast



Dr Mohana Amirtharajah is an orthopaedic surgeon, who has recently returned from a 2-month mission to Jordan with Médecins Sans Frontières, where she was operating daily on Syrian war wounded. What we've seen on our television screens, she says, is a fraction of the reality for those fleeing the conflict. Full story in the Careers section, pages C1-C2.

Podcasts are available at www.mja.com.au/multimedia/podcasts and from iTunes. Also available as videos at www.mja.com.au/multimedia

From The Cochrane Library

Pain, pregnancy or Pilates – there is plenty to peruse

Paracetamol has been under the microscope a lot recently. A new review of oral non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) versus other oral analgesics for acute soft tissue injury continues this trend. Sixteen trials involving more than 2100 mostly young adults with various strains, sprains and bruises evaluated a range of drugs, including paracetamol and opioids. The review found low-quality but consistent evidence that NSAIDs and paracetamol are similar with respect to pain relief, swelling and return to function but, as you might expect, there is evidence that NSAIDs result in slightly more gastrointestinal side effects (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD007789.pub2).

Meanwhile, the rising tide of allergies in children has spawned an ocean of research. A recent review of eight trials of over 3350 women asks whether giving pregnant women or breastfeeding mothers marine omega-3 supplementation prevents allergies in their young children. The short answer is possibly for some allergies, notably food allergies, but probably not for other conditions such as allergic rhinitis or asthma (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD010085.pub2).

If too much sitting around over this year's cold winter has brought on extra cases of low back pain, it's good to know that Pilates can be added to the list of exercise interventions effective for relieving pain and improving function. A review of 10 studies involving over 500 adults with chronic low back pain also compared Pilates with other forms of

exercise but found no conclusive evidence that it is superior (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD010265.pub2).

Making sense of the burgeoning evidence included in multiple systematic reviews has become an exercise in itself. Cochrane's response is to publish overviews. In recent issues, assisted reproductive technology (ART), bronchiectasis and dressings for foot ulcer have all been given the overviews treatment. The ART overview, for example, synthesises the findings of 59 Cochrane reviews categorising 19 interventions as effective, 13 as promising and 14 as ineffective or possibly ineffective (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD010537.pub4). The evidence is less clear-cut when it comes to dressings for treating foot ulcers in people with diabetes. There is no shortage of systematic reviews but a paucity of included studies in these reviews makes drawing robust conclusions an ongoing challenge (doi: 10.1002/14651858.CD010471.pub2).

For more on these and other reviews, check out www.cochranelibrary.com.



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Top 5 MJA articles online since 31 August 2015

1) Clinical focus/Guidelines: Summary statement: new guidelines for the management of paracetamol poisoning in Australia and New Zealand

Recommendations for the treatment of paracetamol poisoning have been updated

doi: 10.5694/mja15.00614

2) Reflection: Can a medical researcher have too many publications?

doi: 10.5694/mja15.00194

3) News/From NPS MedicineWise: Five reasons to not prescribe opioids

doi: 10.5694/mja15.00737

4) Research: Suboptimal medication-related quality of care preceding hospitalisation of older patients

doi: 10.5694/mja14.01479

5) Research: Medicare Local–Local Health Network partnerships in South Australia: lessons for Primary Health Networks

doi: 10.5694/mja14.01702

Meanwhile, in MJA InSight ...

Violence screening “complex”

“There is no evidence, yet, that screening improves the lives of women in any respect, because the supporting systems are not in place.” — Professor Angela Taft, director of the Judith Lumley Centre at La Trobe University’s School of Nursing and Midwifery

<https://www.mja.com.au/insight/2015/35/violence-screening-complex>

Food inequity a health risk

“Making healthy food affordable is difficult. We want the quality of food to be better, but we still want people to be able to afford to buy essential foods.” — Professor Stephen Colagiuri, professor of metabolic health and co-director of The Boden Institute at the University of Sydney

<https://www.mja.com.au/insight/2015/35/food-inequity-health-risk>

Telehealth lacks consistency

“There are so many players who want to be a part of this space, but the issues around clinical safety, confidentiality and consent are all in a state of flux in Australia.” — Dr Ewen McPhee, chair of Queensland Health’s Telehealth Advisory Committee

<https://www.mja.com.au/insight/2015/35/telehealth-lacks-consistency>