vein thrombosis. Thrombolysis should be considered in patients with major proximal vein thrombosis and threatened venous infarction. Surgical embolectomy is restricted to life threatening proximal thrombosis where all else has failed.

Pregnancy

Anticoagulating doses of heparin are given for deep vein thrombosis in pregnancy. It is essential to confirm the presence of a thrombus objectively. This is usually done by compression ultrasonography (serially if necessary).

Unfractionated heparin or low molecular weight heparin (which has a better risk profile but is not licensed in United Kingdom for this indication) should then be continued throughout the pregnancy and stopped temporarily before delivery. Anticoagulation should be restarted in the puerperium and continued for six weeks to three months. Warfarin is usually contraindicated during pregnancy because it is teratogenic and increases risk of maternal and fetal haemorrhage perinatally. It can be restarted 48 hours after delivery.

Further reading and useful references

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Deep vein thrombosis in pregnancy and puerperium and in women taking contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy

- Normal pregnancy is a hypercoagulable state
- Deep vein thrombosis occurs antepartum in 0.6/1000 women aged < 35 years and 1.2/1000 women > 35 and postpartum in 0.3/1000 and 0.7/1000 respectively
- Age, operative delivery, personal or family history, and thrombophilia are particular risks
- Heparin does not cross the placenta and is not secreted in breast milk
- Prolonged heparin therapy raises concerns about osteoporosis, heparin-induced thrombocytopenia, and allergy
- The combined contraceptive pill increases the relative risk of deep vein thrombosis by 3-4 times
- Hormone replacement therapy also increases the relative risk of deep vein thrombosis by 3-4 times but is associated with a 10 fold higher absolute risk because of the older age group

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The ABC of arterial and venous disease is edited by Richard Donnelly, professor of vascular medicine, University of Nottingham and Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust (richard.donnelly@nottingham.ac.uk) and Nick J M London, professor of surgery, University of Leicester, Leicester (sms16@leicester.ac.uk). It will be published as a book later this year.

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A book that changed me Understanding today's Joads

Like all great books *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck absorbs and entertains but also alters your perspective on life. Its principal theme is intolerance; its uncomfortable lesson is that prejudice lies beneath the surface of us all; its optimistic conclusion is the courage of the human spirit and the kernel of good that remains when all else is stripped away. The poetic style and vernacular dialogue take time at first, but once it hooks you it won't let go.

It is the story of the Joad family. They are Oklahoma farmers whose lives are ruined by the Dust Bowl of the 1930s; forced from their land and fuelled by the American Dream of opportunity they travel west to California. They endure dreadful hardship on the way, and when they arrive their optimistic hopes and dreams are shattered by the hostility they encounter.

Steinbeck's greatest skill is showing us how the Joads engender this hostility, prickling our own innate prejudices. They are crude, crassly naive, violent, and hypocritical—they seem unable to make the link that they are being driven from the land as their forefathers drove the native Indians from it. Yet once you get to know them, feel the pathos of their humanity, and share their experience you become so deeply attached that you are appalled not only at the treatment they receive but also at your own initial prejudicial reaction.

I have just reread the book after 20 years, and its relevance persists. The homeless, the travellers in their caravans next to our busy dual carriageways, the asylum seekers and refugees in Dover

bedsits or imprisoned in detention centres—these are all today's Joads.

Throughout the novel Steinbeck parodies faith that has no moral depth; he uses many biblical themes and images, and some passages of the book are written in a quasiscriptural tone. The Bible developed out of a collective human need to give life context, meaning, and a moral structure, but Steinbeck suggests that this message has been lost along with its contemporary relevance. In a secular, multicultural age *The Grapes of Wrath* shows us that storytelling remains (second only to life itself) the pre-eminent form in teaching us about ourselves and our world. It is a book that teaches empathy, compassion, and tolerance, but perhaps its greatest lesson is that these things need to be taught, and constantly retaught, to us all.

Simon Curtis *general practitioner, Oxford*

We welcome articles of up to 600 words on topics such as *A memorable patient*, *A paper that changed my practice*, *My most unfortunate mistake*, or any other piece conveying instruction, pathos, or humour. If possible the article should be supplied on a disk. Permission is needed from the patient or a relative if an identifiable patient is referred to. We also welcome contributions for "Endpieces," consisting of quotations of up to 80 words (but most are considerably shorter) from any source, ancient or modern, which have appealed to the reader.