Minerva

Doctors who served in the Royal Army Medical Corps will recall the College and Headquarter Mess at Millbank. Following the dramatic reduction in the Medical Corps, the college became part of Chelsea Art College. The Friends of Millbank, a new group set up to ensure that army medical traditions are preserved, wants to increase the memoir material of the old college. Anyone with a story to tell, reminiscences to share, or a fact to record is invited to pass them on to Dr John SG Blair by emailing jgb143@aol.com or calling him on 01738 623 739.

Skin wrinkling may be due to a chronic sympathetic bias within the autonomic nervous system that emerges during ageing. Writing in *Medical Hypotheses* (2006;67:1274-6 doi: 10.1016/j.mehy.2005.12.051), scientists say that conditions that amplify sympathetic bias—such as stress, smoking, amphetamine abuse, heart failure, HIV infection, and transplantation—may accelerate wrinkling, and that sympatholytic agents might ameliorate or even arrest the development of wrinkles.

People with diabetes tend to develop chronic liver disease. A prevalence study found that serum alanine transaminase is three to four times higher in patients with type 1 and type 2 diabetes than in the general population. Alcohol is unlikely to be the cause because the authors excluded people with moderate and excessive alcohol use from the study. The risk of raised alanine transaminase in type 2 diabetes increased with body mass index, and was lower in those taking insulin (*QJM* 2006;99:871-6 doi: 10.1093/qjmed/hcl116).

A doctor writing in the *Journal of Holistic Healthcare* (2006;3:11-4 www.bhma.org) about his experiences of being a patient, says that hospitals have become factories—another example, he says, of industrial mass production, with the raw material of sick people being fed in at one end, and healthy people being turned out en masse at the other. He went in a person and left as a product; somewhere along the line, he lost his identity.

Platensimycin, a new class of antibiotic produced naturally by the mushroom bacterium *Streptomyces platensis*, may be effective against multiresistant superbugs. Researchers need to isolate a purified form of the compound from a mixture of the two distinct chemical types in the compound, the left handed and right handed enantiomers. A team from California has now achieved the first step, synthesising the racemic mixture in the laboratory—paving the way for the production of a single enantiomer

A 65 year old man had multiple admissions to hospital for pleural effusions and pseudomonas airways infection. All his nails had gone yellow five years before, and he had chronic pedal lymphoedema. The yellow nail syndrome consists of the triad of yellow nails, lymphoedema, and pleural effusion; bronchiectasis can also be associated with the syndrome. It may be caused by congenital poorly functioning hypoplastic lymphatics and can appear late in life. Yellow nail syndrome is believed to be rare, but most respiratory centres will have managed a few such patients with bronchiectasis or pleural effusions. No specific treatment is available, and management is directed at symptoms.

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Guidance at bmj.com/advice

(*Angewandte Chemie International Edition* 2006;45 doi: 10.1002/anie.200603892).

Of all the people you meet, who would you trust to tell the truth? It seems that nine out of 10 people in Britain still trust their doctor. When surveyed by the Royal College of Physicians, 92% of people trusted their doctor; teachers, professors, and judges were also trusted. Politicians and government ministers came in at 20%, but journalists are the most untrustworthy, with just 19% of people willing to think they're not telling lies (*Guardian* 2006 Nov 2 www.guardian.co.uk/medicine/story/0,,1937019,00.html).

Adjudin (AF-2364) once held promise as the first male contraceptive pill, but hope faded when oral intake in rats caused severe hepatitis and muscle deterioration. The solution, according to the original team, may lie in coupling Adjudin to a mutant form of follicle stimulating hormone which targets the testes and triggers sperm development. Injections rendered rats infertile within four weeks, and they stayed that way for another month. To counteract human resistance to regular injections, the development of a gel is under way (*Nature Medicine* 2006;12: 1323-8 doi: 10.1038/nm1420).

Boys and young men have huge unmet needs for advice on sexual health says Brook, the sexual health charity for young people (www.brook.org.uk). The number of young men

using Brook's 17 centres for confidential sexual services and advice has increased by 215% over the past 10 years—and Brook is now collaborating with Working with Men, a charity devoted to projects covering all aspects of men's lives, with the support of Durex, a condom manufacturer, to try to establish what would encourage even more men to use available services.

Having done well at school puts people who develop a psychotic illness at higher risk of killing themselves, unlike those in the general population, according to a 35 year follow-up of the north Finland 1966 birth cohort (*Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 2006;114:357-62 doi: 10.1111/j.1600-0447.2006.008000.x). Assessing suicide risk in psychotic patients may be improved by taking into account pre-morbid educational achievement.

Getting reimbursed for the costs of smoking cessation therapy may help people keep to the straight and narrow for longer, but abstinence rates remain low. A randomised controlled trial reported in *Addiction* (2006; 101:1656-61 doi: 10.1111/j.1360-0443.2006.01578.x) found that those who got their money back for six months were twice as likely as the control group to still abstain from smoking six months after the reimbursement period (5.5% v 2.8%). Although the difference between the two groups was still significant two years later, abstinence rates were just 4.3% and 1.6%.