MINERVA

Cancerbackup—an information and support charity—has launched a comic book for children diagnosed with cancer. It's designed to alleviate the fear and mystery surrounding childhood cancer, and to help them understand about the kinds of treatment they might undergo. *Peppermint Ward* is written for 6-9 year olds and can be obtained free of charge by calling 0800 800 1234. The charity also offers an interactive website to teenagers called TIC (Teen Info on Cancer; www.click4tic.org.uk).

Surgeons attending a 14 year old girl who had a gunshot wound to her ankle left the bullet in situ because of concerns about the vascular supply to the talus bone. But a week later her blood lead concentration was 270 µg/l (normal 0-100 µg/l), and no other risk factors suggesting previous lead exposure were identified. The bullet was promptly removed and chelation therapy was started. Lead concentrations dropped dramatically but rebounded when treatment was stopped. She needed nine months of intermittent chelation therapy before the concentrations stabilised (*Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery* 2006;88:2726-9).

Teenagers with eating disorders may well be surfing the net for pro-eating disorder websites without their parents knowing, according to a study in *Pediatrics* (2006;118:1635-43). A survey of 106 parents and 76 patients showed that parents often knew about such websites but had no idea their children were accessing them. Teenagers who sought them out were more likely to have the illness for longer and reported spending less time on school homework than those who didn't.

Fish are the primary source of n-3 fatty acids, which may be cardioprotective. Data from populations that eat marine fatty fish indicate that increased fish consumption correlates with increased serum n-3 fatty acid values, but these results may not be generalisable to other types of fish. A Canadian food frequency report (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 2006;84:1299-307) found that the amount of fresh water local fish eaten in the study communities had no effect on serum n-3 fatty acid concentrations.

An infectious agent may be partly responsible for tumours of the nervous system. The Swedish Family Cancer Database shows that the number

A 58 year old woman presented with an exposed bony crater lined by ragged borders on the right maxillary jaw. She reported a history of a painful non-healing extraction site of about two months' duration. The only relevant medical history was metastatic breast cancer diagnosed in 2004. She had completed treatment with intravenous bisphosphonates (pamidronate and zoledronic acid) six months earlier. Results of radiographic evaluation were negative. Bisphosphonate associated osteonecrosis of the jaw is a recently described adverse effect that results from suppression of bone metabolism, which leads to increased demand for osseous repair in the hypodynamic bone.

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of siblings, a possible indicator of early life exposure to infectious agents, correlates with the incidence of cancer of the nervous system in children (*Neurology* 2006;67:1979-83). But the association is not straightforward because the number of younger siblings correlated well, but the number of older siblings did not.

A junior resident in emergency medicine describes his "adrenaline storm" response to a mass public event that became a "mass casualty incident." He was posted at a Hajj medical mission looking after three million pilgrims to Mecca, and the incident was a stampede that occurred just 200 yards from the emergency department. Commenting on the experience in *Academic Emergency Medicine* (2006;13:1342-4), a senior emergency physician says it's crucial to remember the different roles that assigned providers of care and qualified bystanders have in such an emergency.

The odds of a male birth are said to fall in populations in which external stressful events—such as earthquakes, social upheaval, or political unrest—have occurred. Whether this reduction is due to fewer male conceptions or increased male fetal death isn't known. In New York city, from 1 January to 28 January 2002 (four months after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001),

the odds of a male birth fell to 1, significantly below the expected value (*Human Reproduction* 2006;21:3127-31). Data analysis controlled for trends, seasonality, and other factors that may have made this a chance finding. These findings support the male fetal loss explanation of the association between sex ratio and population shocks.

Large epidemiological studies indicate that the only notable side effect of statin therapy is a small excess risk of a rise in transaminase values. Data from more than 74 000 patients enrolled in 35 clinical trials found no significant absolute risk of myalgia. Odd then, that many patients in the real world report that their statin tablets cause muscle cramps (*Circulation* 2006;114:1788-97).

Managing patients with mental health problems in the community is better than hospital care. Traditionally it has been assumed that having access to past psychiatric records at the time of making an emergency assessment helps reduce the risk of admission. But in reality the opposite seems to occur. During six months, in two different hospitals, when notes were available to duty junior psychiatrists, the likelihood of admission for patients with chronic or enduring mental illnesses increased by 27% (*Psychiatric Bulletin* 2006;30:3449-51).