

From the journals

Importance of parents reading aloud to children

An infant who is held on a parent's lap, looking at pictures is experiencing focused social and emotional stimulation from the parent. The short sentences, repetitive phrases, and limited vocabulary of picture books, assist processing and acquisition of language by the baby. Reading aloud is to be encouraged when children are as young as 6 months. Children become interested in objects and pictures at this age. Reading aloud helps them to grow up with specific early literacy skills and develop a liking for books and reading. *Archives of Diseases of Children* 2003; **88**: 651–4. Parents should be informed of these findings and encouraged to practise them.

Results of ALLHAT Study: diuretics come on top

The ALLHAT trial, the largest clinical trial conducted so far on hypertension, studied the efficacy of different antihypertensive drugs in over 40,000 high-risk hypertensive patients aged 55 years or more and they were followed up for over 5 years. Some findings of clinical relevance from this study are given below.

Diuretics in low doses are safe and effective. Often they are the preferred drugs for initial treatment. In the above trial chlorthalidone (12.5 to 25 mg/day) was used. They could be used in combination with other drugs. The low cost of diuretics has made them less attractive commercially! ACE inhibitors and angiotensin receptor blockers are good first or second choice drugs especially when combined with a low dose diuretic or calcium channel blocker. If three drugs are used one of them should be a diuretic. Calcium channel blockers are reserved as second or third line drugs. They can be used alone in the elderly and in patients who are unable to restrict their salt intake. Beta blockers have good efficacy and are especially suitable for those with ischaemic heart disease, arrhythmias or a hyperdynamic circulation. They could be used in combination with a diuretic or calcium channel blocker, preferably from the dihydropyridine class. The important point is to lower the blood pressure to a target level and maintain it at that level using any drug or a combination of drugs. *Quarterly Journal of Medicine* 2003; **96**: 771–3. In these days of rising drug prices use of diuretics should be encouraged as they are effective, safe and inexpensive.

Minor renal dysfunction is a good predictor of cardiovascular events

Several studies have now shown that minor renal dysfunction is a good predictor of cardiovascular events. The renal changes include minor increase of serum creatinine (1.3–1.5 mg/dL). This factor is particularly important in subjects who do not have the well accepted criteria of increased risk such as hypertension, diabetes, dyslipidaemia and smoking. Although prospective data are not available the existing data suggests that these patients deserve therapy with ACE inhibitors. *Clinical Medicine* 2003; **3**: 357–9.

Complications are high in children having culture positive typhoid fever

A prospective cross-sectional study in Malaysian children with typhoid fever who are culture positive for *Salmonella typhi* has shown a high incidence of complications. From a sample of 102 children a third of them developed complications including anicteric hepatitis, paralytic ileus, cholecystitis, peritonitis, osteomyelitis, bone marrow suppression, haemolysis, myocarditis, psychosis and the syndrome of inappropriate secretion of ADH. Anicteric hepatitis was the commonest complication and 12 children had multiple complications. In this study the complications were not related to age, sex, duration of illness before admission, prior use of antibiotics, nutritional status, any specific antibiotics or to the antibody titres. Children with splenomegaly, thrombocytopenia or leucopenia were more likely to develop complications. *Journal of Tropical Paediatrics* 2002; **48**: 102–8. Paediatricians need to be vigilant for these complications now.

Hymenolepis nana is a common cause of paediatric diarrhoea in slum dwellers

A study of paediatric diarrhoea in urban slums of New Delhi has shown a total prevalence of pathogenic parasites as 33.6% and an unexpected high prevalence of *Hymenolepis nana* at 9.9%. *Journal of Tropical Paediatrics* 2002; **48**: 331–4. The authors stress that further studies should be done to determine the public health significance of this parasite.

Anaemia in diabetic patients needs more attention

A questionnaire-based interview of 1,054 diabetics from six European countries has shown that tiredness and lethargy are the two common symptoms found in diabetics. Their work, leisure and relationships are all adversely

affected by these two symptoms. Anaemia is an important complication found in diabetics and the two symptoms are most marked in diabetics with anaemia. The patients themselves were not much concerned about their anaemia. As anaemia has a big impact on quality of life and is easily treatable, practitioners should educate the patients, and diagnose and treat anaemia in diabetic patients. *Current Medical Research and Opinion* 2003; **19**: 394–401.

Doctors underestimate radiation exposure of patients

A questionnaire survey among 130 doctors in the UK has shown that their knowledge about radiation received by patients undergoing common radiological investigations was poor. If the exposure during a chest x-ray is taken as 1 unit dose of radiation, an abdominal x-ray will have an exposure of 75 units, lumbar spine x-ray 120 units and a computed tomography (CT) of abdomen 400 units. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) does not expose patients to radiation. Although the risk to a patient's health is small, when we consider the number of patients who receive inappropriate or repeat examination, the above findings are of concern. *British Medical Journal* 2003; **327**: 371–2.

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