

Other journals in brief

A selection of abstracts of clinically relevant papers from other journals.

The abstracts on this page have been chosen and edited by John R. Radford.

AGEING

The art of medicine. The art of the demographic dividend

O'Neill D. *The Lancet* 2011; DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60612-0

The Snail (l'escargot).

Dental professionals, as with all of society, will be challenged as to how to deliver sensitively the needs of the 'grey tsunami'. Reduced salivary flow and less than ideal home care as a consequence of enfeebled hands, have devastating consequences for the natural dentition. In this paper focusing on the fine arts, it is asserted that ageing enhances being human. For example, Richard Strauss composed *Metamorphosen* at the age of 81. Edvard Munch depicted poignantly 'a mixture of loneliness and a fierce independence' in *Selvportrett mellom klokken og sengen*, a self-portrait painted in the last years of his life. Furthermore, it was not until Henri Matisse was in his ninth decade and in a wheelchair, that he employed découpage in *The Snail*. The author cites Susan Sontag who wrote: 'Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick'.

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2011.595

'DISUTILITY ACCRUING'

Against homeopathy – a utilitarian perspective

Smith K. *Bioethics*; DOI:10.1111/j.1467-8519.2010.01876.x

'...a medical tool gains moral content if by its intrinsic nature it is ineffective'. Homeopathy is therefore not morally neutral.

Readers of this journal have been exercised recently as to the merits, or otherwise, of homeopathic dentistry. Homeopathy is based on two central principles. In the 'law of similars', Hahnemann observed on himself that cinchona bark (the natural source of quinine, still occasionally used to treat malaria) produced similar symptoms to malaria. Then there is the 'law of infinitesimals'. This states that the potency of the agent increases in the diluting process. The author of this paper cites others that have reported there is 'no good evidence in support of the efficacy of homeopathy.' Several normative ethical conundrums(ra) are explored including tensions between utility and disutility. One muses if the views espoused in this paper will be balanced by another paper entitled *For homeopathy – a deontological perspective*.

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2011.596

MANAGING RISK

Screening for future cardiovascular disease using age alone compared with multiple risk factors and age

Wald N J, Simmonds M *et al.* *PLoS ONE* 2011; **6(5)**: e18742. DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.0018742

'...from the assessment of risk to the reduction of risk.'

The aim of this study was to compare the efficacy of using age alone with regular Framingham screening (an algorithm using age, sex, smoking status, diabetic status, serum cholesterol, and blood pressure) in order to assess the risk of developing future cardiovascular disease (CVD). Using statistical modelling, age-screening was as effective as Framingham screening including the overall estimated costs (c. £2,000 per CVD-free year). It should be borne in mind however, that the risk of a 50-year-old suffering from CVA in the following 10 years is only 2.8%, although clearly the impact can be catastrophic. Paradigm shifts from assessment of risk to the reduction of risk have parallels with some dental preventative approaches. The first author of this paper declared that he holds patents for a combination pill for the prevention of CVD.

DOI: 10.1038/sj.bdj.2011.597

GUSTATION

Taste dysfunction: a practical guide for oral medicine

Cowart B J. *Oral Dis* 2011; **17**: 2–6

Taste disturbance is a complication of an inferior alveolar nerve block, albeit rare.

In this succinct yet informative invited review, it is re-stated that loss of smell is more common than loss of taste. Those who have loss of smell are seen by an otorhinolaryngologist. Candidal infections 'may give rise to phantom taste...'. If this is suspected, it may be appropriate to prescribe oral antifungal agents on an 'empirical' basis. The chorda tympani nerve, a branch of the facial nerve, passes through the middle ear and then 'piggy-backs' on the lingual nerve. Not only can taste disturbance occur after damage to the middle ear, but also as a complication of third molar surgery and rarely following an inferior alveolar nerve block. Usually taste disturbance is association with medications and even zinc deficiency although the latter is controversial. Burning mouth syndrome may cause and not be a consequence of psychological morbidity.

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