

Antiepileptics find use for indications other than epilepsy, often as analgesics for neuropathic pain. Surprisingly, gabapentin has now been compared with placebo in a trial of 420 women with breast cancer who were having two or more hot flushes a day. A dose of 900 mg a day worked best, reducing the frequency of hot flushes by 26% and their severity by 30%, relative to placebo. Ten women taking this dose withdrew from the study because of adverse effects – tiredness was the commonest symptom. Fortunately, neurologists will not be called upon to decide which of the many drugs available for hot flushes should be used.

Lancet 2005; 366 , 818–24.

The final results of the International Subarachnoid Aneurysm Trial show that at one year, about 140 patients avoided death or disability for every 1000 patients with ruptured aneurysms treated with endovascular coiling compared with surgical clipping (*Lancet* 2005; 366 : 809–17). An accompanying editorial reminds us of the debate that followed the publication of the preliminary results – some felt that the results favoured coiling while others felt that the trial was flawed (*Lancet* 2005; 366 : 783–5). One problem is that not many aneurysms were thought to be suitable for coiling during the trial, naturally these (69%) were excluded from the study. So coiling is better than clipping, but only when you can insert a coil which these days seems to be in the great majority of patients. No doubt the debate will continue, particularly with respect to the durability of coiling which will only be known after many more years of follow up.

Acupuncture is widely used for the treatment of tension-type headache, but its effectiveness is debated. A randomised trial with 270 patients in Germany compares acupuncture with minimal acupuncture (superficial needling at nonacupuncture points) and with no acupuncture. Acupuncture was more effective than no treatment but not significantly more effective than minimal acupuncture.

BMJ 2005, 331 , 376–382

Stuttering can severely impair communication and have devastating social, emotional, educational and vocational effects. A pragmatic, open plan, randomised trial of 54 children in New Zealand used the Lidcombe programme and found that children who were treated had significantly fewer stuttered syllables after nine months than children in the control group. The authors say that treatment should begin in the preschool years because it is more effective then. Although some children who stutter in their preschool years improve without treatment, it is impossible to identify them early on.

BMJ 2005, 331 , 659–61

Doing epidemiological research in the least developed remote villages in India is a daunting task, especially for conditions like birth defects. Nevertheless, teams of women fieldworkers recruited from the same villages interviewed illiterate women with the help of a photo album of common birth defects and found the prevalence to be as high as about 7 per 1000 live births. Given that

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this is likely to be an underestimate, India's Ministry of Health has plenty to do to bring the figure down.

Lancet 2005, 336 , 930–1

Americans are living longer now than they did in 1970. The age standardized death rate (per 100 000 per year) from all causes combined decreased from 1242 in 1970 to 845 in 2002. The largest percentage decrease was in death rate from stroke (63%) but this decline has slowed down. Several other countries have reported similar slowdowns in the decrease in stroke mortality. According to the authors, analyses that differentiate subgroups show that an increase in haemorrhagic stroke may be partly offsetting a continuing decrease in ischaemic stroke.

JAMA 2005, 294 , 1255–9

What conditions does aspirin prevent? It is said that short-term aspirin use has been successful in preventing recurrent colorectal adenoma. New data from a large cohort of women enrolled in the US nurses' health study now indicate that both aspirin and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs may be useful for the primary prevention of colorectal cancer. But neurologists who prescribe low dose aspirin may not be preventing colorectal cancer because substantially higher doses are needed and for long periods – 10 years.

JAMA 2005, 294 , 914–23

Many residents would have liked to have taken part in this study but might not like its message. Thirty-four US residents in paediatrics were paid to be tested under four conditions: light call, light call with alcohol, heavy call, and heavy call with placebo. Performance was measured by looking at sustained attention, vigilance and simulated driving tasks. After a heavy call rotation residents performed as badly as they did with a 0.04–0.05 g% blood alcohol concentration during a light call rotation. Driving after a heavy call is as dangerous as drinking and driving after a light call.

JAMA 2005, 294 , 1025–33