

Rabies virus from an organ donor killed four transplanted patients in Texas last year within 8 weeks of the transplant. Two of them had received a kidney, one a liver, and one a vascular graft. Investigators found rhabdovirus particles in baby mice inoculated with samples from the patients. The donor had died of subarachnoid haemorrhage and routine infection screens had been negative. Friends only later recalled that the donor had been bitten by a bat.

*New England Journal of Medicine* 2005, 352, 1103–11.

Combining vaccines has several advantages, but these are meaningless if the vaccines do not work. A combined vaccine against *Streptococcus pneumoniae* and group C *Neisseria meningitidis* did not protect children as well as the single meningitis C vaccine though it provoked a satisfactory immune response against *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. Moreover, the trial done on 240 infants in the UK found that the combined vaccine reduced the infants' immunological responses to other vaccines including diphtheria and *Haemophilus influenzae* type B. The disappointed researchers say that these results might mean the end for this particular combination of vaccines.

*JAMA* 2005, 293, 1751–8.

The drug treatment of behavioural disturbances in patients with dementia continues to be a challenge especially following concerns about the risk of stroke with risperidone and olanzapine. The challenge has not been made any easier by the findings of a randomised controlled trial of quetiapine and rivastigmine, which concluded that these drugs were ineffective against agitation in patients with dementia in institutional care. Moreover, quetiapine was associated with greater cognitive decline than placebo.

*BMJ* 2005, 330, 874–7.

Morphine plus gabapentin is effective for neuropathic pain and the combination seems to be better than either of these drugs given alone, finds a crossover trial. Fifty-seven patients with either diabetic neuropathy or postherpetic neuralgia took part in the trial. The combination was associated with less pain related interference with mood and with higher scores for vitality and social functioning. At the maximum tolerated dose the combination caused a higher frequency of constipation than gabapentin alone and a higher frequency of dry mouth than morphine alone. Interestingly, the trial used an active placebo to minimise inadvertent unblinding. Only a quarter of the participants correctly identified when they were receiving the gabapentin-morphine combination, which is no more than would be expected by chance.

*New England Journal of Medicine* 2005, 352, 1324–34.

The number of drugs used as adjuvants to levodopa to treat patients with Parkinson's disease has gone up with the recent addition of rasagiline to the list. A double blind randomised trial in nearly 700 patients tested rasagiline, entacapone, and placebo as adjuvants to levodopa. Rasagiline and entacapone both improved symptoms compared with placebo, decreasing off-time and increasing time spent without dyskinesia. The list of adjuvants already includes bromocriptine, selegiline, entacapone, and tolcapone. Which adjuvant should we prefer and what are the next questions?

*Lancet* 2005, 365, 947–54.

Vitamin E always manages to be in the news – only to disappoint later. This time a randomised double blind study of vitamin E or donepezil versus placebo in 769 patients with mild cognitive impairment finds no significant differences in the probability of progression to Alzheimer's disease in the vitamin E group or the donepezil group during the 3 years of treatment. Donepezil was, however, associated with a lower rate of progression to Alzheimer's disease during the first 12 months of treatment.

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For the treatment of hydrocephalus, researchers in Mexico have developed a continuous flow shunt and tested it against a traditional valvular shunt. In a five year period, ventriculoperitoneal shunting was done on 114 patients with the continuous flow shunt and on 193 with a conventional valvular shunt. The failure rate was 14% for the continuous flow shunt and 46% for the conventional shunt. Signs of over drainage developed in 40% of patients treated with a valvular shunt, but were not seen in patients with the continuous flow shunt. The authors say that the continuous shunt works because it has a precise cross sectional internal diameter of 0.51 mm—calculated according to the mean rates of cerebrospinal fluid production.

*Surg Neurol* 2005, 63, 197–203.

A new sign in medicine is welcome by those who describe it and a few mean examiners. So what is the hush sign? Two women repeatedly moved their right index fingers to their mouth while puckering their lips during complex partial seizures. The authors called this ictal behaviour the hush sign and report that it indicates a non dominant temporal lobe focus. Both patients had anterior temporal lobectomy with amygdalohippocampectomy, pathological examination showed hippocampal sclerosis, and the behaviour disappeared after the seizures were controlled.

*Epilepsy Behav* 2005, 6, 452–5.