

The British Journal of General Practice

The Journal of The Royal College of General Practitioners

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In the *Journal* this month:

Editorials

- The editor looks ahead to the launching of an expanded journal that will include an education and views section as well as peer-reviewed research papers. Michael King asks how outcome can best be measured in general practice psychotherapy and introduces Sharp's paper on panic disorder and agoraphobia, also in this issue.

The discipline and literature of general practice

- The *British Journal of General Practice* is soon to be issued in a new and expanded format that will accommodate news, information and features. The editorial board's statement emphasizes the continuing importance of general practice as a scientific discipline and reaffirms its commitment to developing the *BJGP* as a leading scientific journal of record.

A readership survey of the *BJGP*

- Wilkinson and colleagues asked members of the RCGP's Midland Faculty what they thought about the *BJGP* and how they would like it to change. Using a postal questionnaire they discovered that readers were generally satisfied with the core content of the *BJGP* but wanted it to expand to include humour, clinical reviews and medical politics, for example. There was no evidence that the *BJGP* was more appealing to the academic GP.

Cognitive behaviour therapy for panic disorder and agoraphobia

- Sharp and colleagues compared the relative effectiveness of fluvoxamine and cognitive behaviour therapy for treating panic disorder and agoraphobia in a primary care setting. Outcome was expressed in terms of brief global measures suitable for use in general practice. Treatment groups using cognitive behaviour therapy showed the strongest and most consistent response.

Audit facilitators and the care of children with asthma

- Can audit facilitators improve the management of children with asthma? McCowan and colleagues examined the long-term effect of an intervention by an audit facilitator and investigated the implications for health services costs.

Hormone replacement therapy in the prevention of osteoporosis

- Therapeutic monitoring of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is not carried out routinely in primary care. In Rodgers and Miller's cross-sectional sample of patients, more than half of the women using transdermal oestradiol patches were inadequately to prevent against osteoporosis. The authors recommend that women who are using HRT to prevent osteoporosis should have their serum oestradiol levels monitored and the dosage adjusted accordingly.

Risk factors for late-life insomnia

- Insomnia is widely reported and treated in general practice, yet there has been little research into its natural history. Morgan and Clarke used eight-year longitudinal data to estimate the risk of insomnia associated with selected health and lifestyle factors. They found that the psychiatric, somatic and lifestyle factors significantly and independently increased the risk of insomnia in older patients; age and sex were not in themselves risk factors.

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The cost of GP consultations

● Cost-effectiveness calculations require that unit costs be derived for services such as GP consultations, but there is no standard method for such a procedure in the UK. McGregor describes three steps that should be followed in the costing process and offers a method based on a cost-price index for updating costs calculated in previous years.

Maternal influences on teenage pregnancy

● The *Health of the Nation* report aimed to at least halve the 1989 conception rate in teenagers under 16 years. Seamark and Gray confirmed that pregnant teenagers in the 1990s are more likely to have a mother who had a teenage pregnancy than are non-pregnant teenagers. They also found that the daughters of teenage mothers are more likely to continue their pregnancies.

Common breastfeeding problems

● A greater understanding of breastfeeding by GPs and health visitors would help breastfeeding mothers. Aggarwal and Aggarwal investigated the advice given on breastfeeding problems by community health professionals and found that their knowledge of 10 common breastfeeding problems could be improved significantly with the help of a questionnaire followed by detailed explanatory answers.

General practice — a postmodern specialty?

● The 'modern' view of the world assumes that we can discover the essential truth of the world scientifically, while postmodern theory emphasizes the uncertainty and subjectivity of our knowledge. Mathers and Rowland argue that the values of postmodernism are closer to everyday general practice than are the values of scientific rationalism, and they press for their inclusion in a new general practice curriculum.

Letters to the editor

● Letters this month comment on megatrials, a scoring system for throat infection, the risk of cardiovascular disease in hypertensive patients, skill-mix in primary care, overdose and termination of pregnancy, medical students' career preferences, and repeat prescribing.

Book and video reviews

● This month's reviews assess a 70-minute video on living with Parkinson's disease, a first-person account of acute myeloid leukaemia, and books on health service rationing, changing services for older people, prescribing the combined oral contraceptive pill, getting work published, and managing quality in practice.

International digest

● This month's digest items, compiled by Douglas Garvie, examine articles on rational prescribing, domestic violence, air pollution, firearms, primary health care in rural Africa, and psychotropic drugs and myocardial infarction.