Contributors

John Launer helps at a drop-in for destitute asylum seekers and their families, run by the New North London Synagogue. His day jobs include being a medical educator, family therapist, columnist, and sessional GP.
jlauner@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Alexandra L Connan's piece was reviewed by, among others, Roger Neighbour. Roger rebuked her for 'verbal and syntactic infelicities' for which she is properly grateful.
alex.connan@btopenworld.com

David Connell is glad to be recovering from bowel surgery and has a liking for hospital food. He wonders if the re-run of cookery shows on postoperative TV are increasing anti-emetic demand. He was particularly distraught to be unable to embrace Nigella Lawson in the wee hours of the morning. Gutted.
dg.connell@virgin.net

Searching for **Mike Fitzpatrick** on Wikipedia reveals interesting sports journalism, unrelated, but not as yet accessing our almost longest serving columnist. Month after Month, for almost 10 years. He is a phenomenon, and the *BJGP's* starriest act. Though he'll recoil in embarrassment.
fitz@easynet.co.uk

Jeff Clark is a member of the south Bristol GP trainers' workshop and thanks his colleagues who value imagination more than knowledge. Lighten up, Jeff!
Jeff.Clark@gp-L81033.nhs.uk

Steve Cox is a GP in St Helens and medical director who, despite an overwhelming workload, is desperately trying not to become competitive with his wife who is heavily into fitness regimes and uses a personal trainer three times per week!
stephenjcox@btinternet.com

John Holden is a GP in St Helens who is happiest in the isolation of a Northern fell.
John.Holden@hsthpc.nhs.uk

Chris Heath is a GP from Horsham, West Sussex.
chrisjheath@gmail.com

Roger Jones is reconfigured, Now with Working Joints. Professor at London medical school of some repute, with Italian car sensibilities, which should earn QoF points but doesn't.
Roger.jones@kcl.ac.uk

Jane Roberts
jane.roberts@sunderland.ac.uk

Saul miller
saulmiller@me.com

Doom?

'Earlier on today apparently a woman rang the BBC and said she'd heard there was a hurricane on the way. Well if you're watching, don't worry, there isn't. Having said that actually, the weather will become very windy ...'

These words, from the mouth of Michael Fish, television weatherman, doyen of checked suits, presaged the great storm of 1987 in southern England and France. Seventeen years later and completely unheralded, a far greater disaster — a tsunami — laid waste to coastal regions around the Indian Ocean on Boxing Day 2004. The 22 deaths attributed to the 1987 storm pale next to the estimated 225 000 who died as a result of the tsunami.

Today, the sun beats down out of a cloudless sky and the sea is flat. But other crises hold us in thrall. Swine flu splutters on, awaiting its chance to replicate the public health disaster that was the 1919 influenza outbreak. This winter is the predicted time and there have been oh-so-many emails arriving with details on how to cope. Nothing so far about coffin repositories and not offering a choice of handles or finishes, but no doubt there would have been were I an undertaker. Instead we are left to debate details like whether we are meant to buy our own face masks now or rely on a supply from the mother ship.

In the East, the North Koreans rattle their nuclear cage and threaten to reignite a conflict that ended over 50 years ago. This reminds me of childhood panics about the Cold War erupting into a rather too hot nuclear one, as plenty predicted during my teenage years. Where have all those warheads gone? Something else to worry about there, if I am not too taken by reminiscences of massed water fights, squeezing blackheads, hot sticky kisses at end-of-term parties, and *The Birdy Song*.

Meanwhile global warming simmers away, and we await the next instalment of polar-melt news. Painting roofs white appears to have come and gone as a solution. No doubt white-ism will drift back in somewhere, sometime, and in some way though, perhaps with a future

shift in the NHS dress code? With beta-blockers being now a treatment of choice for heart failure and aspirin looking to be of no benefit¹ for virtually everyone who takes it for primary prevention, future unpredicted shifts in thinking are undoubtedly foreseeable, much as future unpredicted public health calamities are.

Back at the BBC, weather reports are now peppered with Serious Weather Warnings to avert any risk of being accused again of under-egging the pudding. In winter, whole regions are regularly given crisis warnings because a frost might be severe enough to cause black ice on a few commuting routes; in summer, even the sun can find itself listed as a danger.

Currently at 'Level 5', the Swine Flu outbreak has its own version of a Severe Weather Warning.² Remember the Millennium Bug? The notion was that on 1 January 2000 the computers controlling the infrastructure we depended upon would reset to the year 1900 and a meltdown would ensue. Britain spent millions trying to prepare, albeit small money when set against the subsequent waste on NHS computing. Hours were spent producing regulation crisis plans: there was no doubt this was Level 6, in 'Swine-Flu-speak'. At home, anticipating the return to Victorian living, we had candles and matches, a dalliance with grow-your-own, lots of tinned peaches, corsets and lace ... and then the Millennium itself arrived ... and nothing happened.

Disasters will happen, but predicting them is the problem. This morning, discussing the fine weather with another parent at the school gate, she warned it will break by the weekend. I shrugged, enjoying the sun. She should be worrying about Colony Collapse Disorder in bees, I thought.

REFERENCES

1. Antithrombotic Trialists' Collaboration. Aspirin in the primary and secondary prevention of vascular disease: collaborative meta-analysis of individual participant data from randomised trials. *Lancet* 2009; 373: 1849–1860.
2. DirectGov. Flu alert levels. http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Swineflu/DG_177914 (accessed 3 June 2009).

DOI: 10.3399/bjgp09X453710