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Research papers this month

Therapeutic substitution and conservatism as cost-containment strategies

Wilson *et al* note that it has been reported that fundholding practices altered their prescribing patterns in order to contain prescribing costs; however, it is not known what changes fundholders may have made in their choice of medicine to achieve this. By comparing the prescribing of ulcer-healing drugs and antidepressants by fundholders with non-fundholders, Wilson *et al* aimed to determine how fundholding practices contained prescribing costs. They conclude that fundholders use therapeutic substitution with medicines of equal effectiveness.

Influence of prescription patterns on anti-microbial resistance

The global pandemic of antibiotic resistance is causing considerable concern, and a major reason for the growing world-wide resistance problem is the overuse of anti-infective drugs; however, this is still a relatively minor problem in most of the Nordic countries. In this study, Lindbæk *et al* aimed to offer some suggestions as to why Norway has maintained a favourable situation regarding resistant microbes over the past 10 years. The results show that the most likely reason for this favourable situation is the use of penicillin V for most of the common airway diseases and a low total prescription volume of antibiotics.

Impact of training in problem-based interviewing on psychological problems

Scott *et al*'s study aimed to examine the impact of training in problem-based interviewing on the detection and management of psychological problems in primary care. The authors found that GPs trained in problem-based interviewing were better at recognizing and managing psychological distress than control GPs. They conclude that such training could provide a template for the training of both GP trainees and their teachers, leading to improved standards of care for psychological disorders in primary care.

Clinical skills assessment

Kelly *et al* note that, from September 1996, all GP registrars completing vocational training in the UK must demonstrate competence by means of a four-part assessment procedure. In this study they look at the accuracy of one of the components of vocational training: the trainers' report. The authors conclude that there is an assumption that many of the clinical skills are being taught and assessed at undergraduate level and during the hospital component, but this cannot be taken for granted. They observe that doubt must also be cast on whether the trainers are using the report appropriately, and whether it is a valid and reliable tool to identify skills deficient in registrars.

Long-term prescribing of proton pump inhibitors

Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) constitute the largest sector of the NHS community drugs bill. To study the extent, reasons, and cost implications of the long-term prescription of PPIs, Hungin *et al* identified subjects on long-term therapy from three practices. The results show that long-term PPI comprised 40% of all PPI costs, estimated at £100 million per annum in the UK, and that, for most patients, doctors can advise on-demand therapy rather than regular once-daily therapy.

Postal urine specimens: a feasible method for genital chlamydial infection screening?

Pilot projects involving the opportunistic screening of women for *Chlamydia trachomatis* are due to commence in several sites. However, Macleod *et al* suggest that there is a danger that this approach will fail to obtain adequate population coverage. To gain true systematic population screening, the authors assessed the potential of postal urine specimens for screening for *Chlamydia*. They surmise that this process could provide a viable basis both for determining prevalence and for a UK screening strategy.

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1. Handysides S. Morale in general practice: is change the problem or the solution? *BMJ* 1994; **308**: 32-34.

Chapter in a book

8. Bogduk N. Sources of low back pain. In: Jayson M (ed). *Lumbar spine and back pain*. 4th edn. Edinburgh: Churchill Livingstone, 1992.

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