

Confounding occurs where there is a third factor associated with the diagnosis of restless legs syndrome that could also, and independently, cause patients to make clinic appointments, thereby artificially enhancing the true prevalence among clinic consulters. A possible source of confounding relates to the observation that individuals with chronic diseases have higher consultation rates and, independently of this, have a greater tendency towards restless legs syndrome.

Overall, I would suggest that the results are important, but the prevalence is probably slightly overestimated due to the effects of bias and confounding. It is interesting to note that other population-based studies have placed the prevalence between 9% and 15%.²

In applying the results of this study to UK primary care, a further judgement needs to be made as to how similar the US clinical attendees would be to patients who consult UK GPs. According to Jones and Menzies, the average three-partner practice in this country would see 8400 patients for generalised conditions per annum;³ approximately three times the number seen in the US situation. It would also be interesting to know whether the US survey was restricted solely to new clinic appointments for unrelated problems. Clearly, some patients may have been follow-up visits and some may have been consulting specifically about restless legs-type symptoms.

However, the overall message is that we should be more alert to restless legs syndrome; the prevalence is certainly much higher than many of us would expect.

The bottom line: Restless legs syndrome is not an uncommon problem among patients who are likely to consult us in routine practice; it may be present in up to a fifth of our patients. We should endeavour to be more alert to the diagnosis.

Nick Summerton

From the journals, October–November 2004

New Eng J Med Vol 351

1607 Endovascular repair of the abdominal aorta may well be the next big step in minimally invasive surgery, with a lower short-term mortality than the open procedure.

1721 A study from Augsburg, which concludes, 'The time spent in cars, on public transportation, or on motorcycles or bicycles was consistently linked with an increase in myocardial infarction'. Frustration, or fumes?

1829 Now that most of us no longer do nights on call, are we likely to make fewer mistakes? Yes, if two studies of US interns are anything to go by: abolishing 24-hour shifts reduced 'attentional failures' and serious medical errors.

1849 Bacterial meningitis in adults almost always presents with at least two of: headache, neck stiffness, fever, and altered mental status, according to this important Dutch study.

1941 This study shows that using ACE inhibitors to reduce blood pressure in type 2 diabetes reduces the development of microalbuminuria.

1952 And angiotensin II receptor blockers are as good as ACE inhibitors at treating established microalbuminuria: this also seems to be true for heart failure and acute myocardial infarction (see *Ann Intern Med* **141**: 693).

Lancet Vol 364

1405 An exciting report of successful unassisted pregnancy following the reimplantation of cryopreserved ovarian tissue from a young woman who had chemotherapy for cancer.

1421 A study showing that more than half of acute medical inpatients are mentally incapable of giving informed consent: their mini-mental state examination (MMSE) scores proved as reliable as more specific assessments.

1497 Stenting the oesophagus for malignant obstruction does not work as well in the long run as local radiotherapy (brachytherapy).

1523 Large heterogeneous systematic reviews can be problematic, but the message from this one is clear: self-management plans work for all kinds of chronic illnesses (see *Gut* **53**: 1639 for the latest example — inflammatory bowel disease).

1603 Do developing countries need more doctors? Yes, there is no substitute, according to this global analysis of human resources and health outcomes.

1663 A large Medical Research Council trial tried to find what sort of assessments of older people work best — universal or targeted, by primary care or a geriatric team? No real difference, it seems: all these do some good...

1678 ... whereas screening adolescent girls for cervical dysplasia or even human papillomavirus may do more harm than good, according to this study and the accompanying editorial (page 1642).

1702 A short review that tries to unravel the significance of vesico-ureteric reflux in children. It seems that surgery has virtually no evidence base.

JAMA Vol 292

1724 The only successful treatment for morbid obesity is bariatric surgery: this review proves that you should send your really gross patients to Barry the Surgeon.

1823 We used to be told that CT scanning was better than MRI scanning at detecting acute intracerebral haemorrhage, but this is no longer the case.

1955 A case-control study claiming that proton pump inhibitors are associated with a higher risk of pneumonia.

1989 Confused by the shoulder? Spend half an hour with this well-illustrated rational clinical examination article and you know more about it; but no-one seems to have done the necessary diagnostic studies in primary care.

2089 Regular influenza vaccinations reduce mortality in older people, more so with age.

Other Journals

Arch Intern Med (**164**: 1985) shows that chiropractic reduces the costs — financial and functional — of back pain: when will we get it paid for by the NHS? B-type natriuretic peptide is an infallible marker for cardiac distress — its use in diagnosing heart failure gets an excellent review on page 1978. A systematic review of trials of antibiotics to prevent myocardial infarction (page 2156) is, alas, negative. *Ann Intern Med* (**141**: 764) finds an increased risk of cardiovascular disease in those taking oral steroids. *Brain* (**127**: 2491) looks at the link between common childhood infections (including measles) and multiple sclerosis, and finds no connection. We all know that alcohol protects against myocardial infarction, but in *Epidemiology* (**15**: 767) comes an Italian study suggesting that this only applies to alcohol taken with food. Spanish wine gets a plug in a study (*Thorax* **59**: 981) claiming a protective effect against lung cancer. In our guest publication, *J Plankton Research* (**26**: 1315), you will learn that for krill, synchronised swimming is a finely tuned adaptive mechanism, whereas in humans it is a harmless social disorder.

Plant of the Month: *Jasminum nudiflorum*

The late, great Graham Stuart Thomas, who died this year, named the winter-flowering jasmine as one of his six essential plants: best tumbling down a bank.