

In celebration of ... Barry Marshall

The Nobel Prize for Medicine and Physiology is always well deserved but can be arcane. Awarded usually for intimate, elegant things that are sub-molecular. I have not too often discussed with patients the hot-of-the-press Nobel Laureate. To be honest, never, until a month or so ago.

Early October and a youth presents with anxious dad — miserable chronic upper respiratory tract congestion completely resistant to all our therapeutic efforts so far; quiescent asthma, family history of peptic ulceration. On whim checked *H. pylori* antigen status, positive on stool specimen. So we re-convened to discuss whether eradication therapy might be worth a shot.

I told them what I knew about *H. pylori*. I'd heard of Barry Marshall, a slightly unhinged Australian gastroenterologist, for the first time in the early 1990s. With a Perth colleague, the pathologist J Robin Warren, he'd spotted the bug in gastric aspirates, then an association with duodenal ulceration, so set out to confirm Koch's Third Postulate re causation. No animal models available so Barry drank a beaker-full of beasties, endoscoped himself every day for a month, duly cataloguing the destruction of his own gastric mucosa. The rest is history. Eradication therapy, a revolution in the management of peptic ulceration — all the time we'd spent as medical students swotting up on Bilioth 1s and 2s could have been spent altogether more usefully.

'Did he win a Nobel Prize for that?' asked dad. 'No he didn't,' I replied. 'But he should have.'

A month later they returned for review. I vaguely remembered an item that I'd seen on the BBC news website late the night before. Had I been dreaming? So as they walked down the corridor I googled 'Barry Marshall Nobel Prize'. A millisecond later, <http://nobelprize.org/medicine/laureates/2005/press.html>. That very weekend Barry had got his gong from the King of Sweden — see <http://nobelprize.org/medicine/laureates/2005/marshall-photo.html>. And read his Nobel address — the most important lesson for any aspiring scientist is uncompromisingly Australian — 'Always be nice to Swedes!'

A celebratory consultation followed. The Very Stuff of general practice!

Alec Logan

Flora medica Richard Lehman

From the journals, December 2005—January 2006

New Eng J Med Vol 353—354

2433 Clostridium is getting more difficile, probably due to increasing use of quinolone antibiotics, selecting aggressive subtypes which are quinolone-resistant. And the bug is getting commoner due to wide use of proton pump inhibitors (*JAMA* **295**: 2989).

2462 Ulcerative colitis responds well to the anti-TNF monoclonal antibody infliximab, without any serious side-effects in two trials. **2539** At every contraceptive update you've been to, you'll have been told not to prescribe the combined pill to women with systemic lupus erythematosus: this prospective study, and another on page 2550, shows that it is safe to do so.

2559 Influenza vaccine annually for all children under 5? In the winter of 2003–2004, over 150 children died of influenza-related causes in the US, and only a third had identifiable risk factors.

2643 UKPDS may leave doubts about the value of tight control in type 2 diabetes, but in type 1, this study shows a 57% reduction in serious cardiovascular events over 17 years in those randomised to tight control.

2667 Oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) unfortunately leaves avian flu viruses with ways to get round its neuraminidase-blocking action (page 2633) and this is borne out by a case report of resistant H5N1.

2758 There's no getting away from it: immediate angioplasty and stenting produce better outcomes after myocardial infarction than thrombolysis; and this trial shows the same following failed thrombolysis.

11 The prospects for a safe rotavirus vaccine didn't look good after a previous type had to be withdrawn due to a risk of intussusception; but now a new vaccine has been trialled and shown to be free of this risk. **34** Intraperitoneal chemotherapy for stage III ovarian with paclitaxel and cisplatin is quite an ordeal, but buys an extra 16 months of life.

Lancet Vol 366—367

2005 Patients with heart failure live 35% longer if they are highly compliant with medication, according to the CHARM trial — a much bigger effect than that of the trial drug, candesartan.

2026 In fact, drugs that block the renin-angiotensin system may be generally overrated, according to this systematic review of their renoprotective properties, which turn out to be imaginary.

2107 Mothers of babies who die suddenly and unexpectedly have a greater risk of complications in later pregnancies.

52 Britain used to have much lower rates of liver cirrhosis than the rest of Europe, but we've managed to catch up and overtake, with particularly heroic efforts from the Scots.

JAMA Vol 294—295

2720 Coughs and sneezes spread diseases, but in the future, they might spread protection from influenza by transmitting the protective strains from live attenuated intranasal vaccine.

2866 The best predictor of death and events in people who have had an acute coronary syndrome is serial measurement of B-type natriuretic peptide.

3101 Eat lots of plant foods containing zinc and vitamins A, C and E if you want to reduce your risk of age-related macular degeneration.

3117 Don't just write down 'FH of CVD' — name the offending relative. Cardiovascular disease in a sibling worsens risk more than disease in a parent.

39 Low-fat diets do not cause rebound weight gain, according to a long-term study in postmenopausal American women.

58 Another 'health supplement' proves harmful to those it is supposed to help: L-arginine increases mortality after myocardial infarction.

Arch Intern Med Vol 165

2644 The 'metabolic syndrome' is obesity, hypertension, impaired glucose tolerance and bad lipids. This UK study unsurprisingly finds that it predicts diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

2671 One reason we can't put statins in the water supply is that they can cause myopathy. This usually resolves within 3 months and half the patients were OK on a different statin.

Ann Intern Med Vol 143—144

785 If you've had a heart attack, worry about a stroke; the risk is 44-fold in the first 30 days, and doubled for 3 years after.

849 This study found that yoga helped chronic back pain if continued for 26 weeks. Levitation was not observed.

10 It's official: patients with peripheral vascular disease who walk more show less disease progression.

Guest publication: *The Journal of Happiness Studies*

Feeling terminally SAD as winter grinds to an end? Turn to a journal which specialises in looking on the bright side of life. Try, for example, a paper arguing that increasing inequality of income has not led to decreasing life satisfaction (2005; **6**: 457).

Plant of the Month: *Chimonanthus praecox*

If your limy soil won't support witch hazel, grow wintersweet for an even nicer smell in late winter.