associated with a significant morbidity, gastro-oesophageal reflux in the absence of this anomaly is a relatively benign self limiting condition, which in the case of vomiting infants can usually be treated successfully by appropriate and adequate thickening of feeds. I am therefore in no doubt as to the clinical importance of distinguishing infantile reflux and the partial thoracic stomach (in whom the antireflux contribution of the abdominal oesophagus is absent) from those with reflux as the only observed abnormality. Such reliance on the prognostic significance of a partial thoracic stomach is of course totally dependent on having an experienced paediatric radiologist as a colleague who is equally aware of the importance of carefully examining infants with reflux for a partial thoracic stomach.

1 J Carré, Le Val, Faint, O Blico, St Andrews, Guernsey.

Growth after gut resection for Crohn's disease

Sir,—We read with interest the paper by McLain et al, and we would like to comment on both the methodology of their data collection and the authors’ conclusions. Firstly, this was a retrospective study, and thus has the major disadvantage of lacking standardisation in the collection of the axiological data. There is no mention in their paper of how height measurements were recorded and standardised, or on the accuracy of the staging of pubertal development.

Secondly, while agreeing with their findings that dramatic growth acceleration may occur after surgery for Crohn's disease, we disagree with their conclusion that 'catch up growth is not limited by the stage of puberty'. We have recently completed a large, prospective study investigating factors influencing growth and bowel resection for Crohn's disease in 42 children requiring surgery before their 17th birthday. All growth indices (including height measurements every three months) were performed prospectively by a clinical auxologist, and an accurate pubertal staging was performed in each patient at the time of surgery, together with the radiological bone age in the majority of cases. Our data (table I) clearly show a strong relationship between height velocity in the first postoperative year and the pubertal status ( Tanner breast and genital stage) at time of operation. The apparent lack of effect of pubertal status on growth in the study of McLain et al may merely reflect the very small number of children in advanced puberty (one), or the retrospective nature of their data collection. In our opinion, the timing of surgical intervention is vital, and should be performed before puberty becomes too advanced and the potential for catch up growth is lost. This is in direct contrast to the conclusion stated in their paper.

Finally, we monitor growth very carefully in all our children with Crohn's disease. Any patient whose growth appears to be suboptimal is referred to a joint paediatric inflammatory bowel disease/growth clinic every three months, which is staffed by a paediatric gastroenterologist, a paediatric endocrinologist, and a clinical auxologist to determine the appropriate strategy for managing the problem (for example, surgery) at an early stage.


Mean preoperative and postoperative height velocities (cm/year) in 42 children undergoing bowel resection for disease grouped according to puberal status at time of operation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before</td>
<td>After</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepubertal:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stage 1 (n=18)</td>
<td>1:85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early puberty:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late puberty:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.0001, tp=not significant.

Forcatch up growth to occur, the growth rate must be rapid enough to catch up with the decreased growth up to the time of puberty. The growth pattern seen in the latter stages of puberty was consistent with this hypothesis.

The paediatric departmental library

What should be the priority for the paediatrician when financial considerations reign and access to current literature is still via books and journals? The rate of change in paediatric practice and slowness of publication in journals and especially in textbooks lead to such a rapid obsolescence that departmental libraries are rarely of use for any in depth study. They provide a source to back up basic case presentations but at a considerable expense. It is impossible to keep shortlisted key titles as every paediatrician has a favourite selection of titles that have proved to be of particular value. These titles have often been selected because the paediatrician has been asked to review that particular book or because a particular subject caught his/her eye from browsing through the unsolicited mailed catalogues or at bookshops at conferences. Most medical schools are purchasing departments to adopt a centralised library system for the sake of more efficient lending schemes and security. So what does the paediatrician provide for the juniors who rarely have time to reach the central and sometimes distant library?

There must be the equivalent of a paediatric encyclopaedia covering most common subjects, such as the Textbook of Paediatrics by Forfar and Arneil or Nelson's Textbook of Pediatrics. Then a selection of system or disease based textbooks should be available. The exact proportion of the subjects will depend on the case mix of the unit. Most general paediatricians will have this basic but whether they can be maintained in their current editions is unlikely at all. A cheap but effective way of maintaining a more up to date file reference for junior staff could be a file of review articles from paediatric journals or free journals such as Hospital Medicine, Medicine International, Update, Hospital Update, Prescriber's Journal, and Drugs and Therapeutics Bulletin. The difficulty is the archiving and security. However the availability of photocopyers has made this easier, although care must be taken to avoid infringing the copyright laws. Another very useful practice is to incorporate a photocopy of a key article in the hospital notes of the patient with this particular diagnosis. It is important to keep updating this and to include this article in the departmental 'useful literature' file. This filing system is unlikely to succeed unless it is clearly one individual's responsibility and that should be at fairly senior level.

However, we are on the brink of a break through in data retrieval which has had the Medline searches and now the CD ROMs as forerunners. When the computer terminal is as familiar and essential an item on the desk in consulting room and ward as the note then we will be able to access up to date original articles and learned reviews at the touch of a few buttons. I can foresee the time when as the medical detail (plus accounting data) is entered into the consulting room computer an automatic search will be made for relevant new literature on that child's condition. A summary of this will be available for inclusion in the word processed report that will be available for any of the child's professionals to access, as well as for inclusion in the hardcopy that the parents will be carrying. So the medical library will pass into the mists of medical history as the stock market runners have and as the filing rooms in hospital will.

Graham Clayden
Reader in paediatrics

Graham Clayden
Reader in paediatrics


Who needs a Filofax when he can have the vade-mecum? This remarkable little book must have a greater concentration of paediat-
Growth after gut resection for Crohn's disease.

C M Evans, J M Kirk, M O Savage and J A Walker-Smith

Arch Dis Child 1991 66: 370
doi: 10.1136/adc.66.3.370

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://adc.bmj.com/content/66/3/370.1.citation

These include:

Email alerting service
Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

Notes

To request permissions go to:
http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions

To order reprints go to:
http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/