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Papers suggesting that intravenous immunoglobulin might benefit children with intractable epilepsy have appeared intermittently for many years. In Holland (*European Journal of Pediatrics* 1994; 153: 762–9) 12 children with Lennox-Gastaut syndrome and three with West's syndrome were treated. Thirteen of the 15 children had a 50% or greater reduction in seizures over the three months of treatment and overall there was a 70% reduction. The reduction in seizures was accompanied by EEG and behavioural improvement. The authors call for a randomised controlled trial.

Rib fractures in young children are an important sign of child abuse. When such fractures are found after external cardiac massage they may be thought to be caused by the resuscitation procedure. In Massachusetts 91 infants who died after attempted cardiopulmonary resuscitation were examined at necropsy and by postmortem radiography (JAMA 1994; 272: 617–8). None was found to have rib fractures. It is suggested that rib fractures in infants are unlikely to be caused by attempts at resuscitation.

Some patients have chronic lung disease indistinguishable from that seen in cystic fibrosis and yet have normal sweat chloride concentrations and do not have any previously known mutation of the cystic fibrosis transmembrane conductance regulator (CFTR) gene. It has therefore been impossible to prove the diagnosis of cystic fibrosis in these patients. Now a new mutation in the gene has been demonstrated in 13 of 23 such patients (*New England Journal of Medicine* 1994; 331: 974–80). The defect is a point mutation in intron 19 of the CFTR gene. For the technically minded it is 'a cytidine phosphate guanosine dinucleotide C-to-T point mutation in intron 19 of the CFTR gene, termed 3849+10 kb C-to-T'.

Homoeopathy is under attack in the United States. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was petitioned on 29 August 1994 to require homoeopathic medications to meet the same standards as allopathic ones for over the counter sale (JAMA 1994; 272: 1154 and 1156). The American Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938 required drugs to be proved to be safe and a 1962 amendment added the requirement that they be shown to be effective. Homoeopathic preparations, however, were specifically exempted from both requirements. As might be expected the petition has provoked fairly vigorous opposition. The FDA commissioner is required to respond to it within 180 days.

It has been known for a long time that Japanese children are more prone to febrile convulsions than are children in the West. In a recent study in Tokyo (*Epilepsia* 1994; 35: 832–41) more than a thousand apparently normal children aged 6 to 12 years had electroencephalography (EEG) performed and epileptiform discharges were seen in 5% of them. Those with abnormal EEG were twice as likely to have had febrile convulsions (18.9% v 9.4%) and, interestingly, focal spikes were more frequently associated with past febrile convulsions than were generalised discharges. Emotional and behavioural problems were no more common in those with epileptiform discharges.

Cushing's syndrome is rare in children. Fifty nine patients aged 4 to 20 years were admitted to the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland between 1982 and 1992 (New England Journal of Medicine 1994; 331: 629–36). Fifty had a pituitary adenoma (Cushing's disease), six had an adrenal cause, and three an ectopic corticotrophin secreting tumour. Twelve patients presented before puberty, two girls and 10 boys. After puberty there were 35 females and 12 males. The most common features were weight gain, growth slowing, amenorrhoea, and hirsutism. Forty seven per cent of patients had hypertension and 19% had mental or behavioural symptoms. Magnetic resonance imaging showed a pituitary tumour in only 26 of the 50 patients who had one. Sampling of blood from the inferior petrosal sinuses before and after giving corticotrophin releasing hormone allowed accurate differentiation between pituitary and non-pituitary disease. Transsphenoidal pituitary surgery, adrenalectomy, or removal of an ectopic source of corticotrophin were curative in 56 of the 59 patients.

There may be an association between having a chronic rheumatic disease, taking a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID), and developing multiple shallow scars on the facial skin (*Journal of Pediatrics* 1994; 125: 817–9). What the relationship is seems unclear but such scars were found in 34 (13.6%) of 250 children attending a rheumatology clinic in Seattle. The scars were not confined to children with any particular rheumatological diagnosis but they were found in 9% of children treated with any NSAID and 22% of those given naproxen. Those with fair skin and blue or green eyes were more at risk but there was a history of prior blistering of the skin in only one patient, making a photosensitivity reaction less likely. Most children and their families were unaware of the facial scars.

A report in JAMA (1994; 272: 1858–60) seems to offer hope of assuring the birth of a non-affected child to parents who are both carriers of cystic fibrosis. A man with congenital bilateral absence of the vas deferens and his partner were both carriers of the $\Delta F508$ mutation. Intracytoplasmic sperm injection into the mother's oocytes were carried out using sperm obtained by aspiration from the father's epididymis. Embryo biopsy was performed before implantation and single blastomeres were analysed for the $\Delta F508$ mutation using the polymerase chain reaction. Two embryos were shown to be homozygous and three heterozygous for the mutation. Implantation of heterozygote embryos resulted in the birth of a healthy $\Delta F508$ carrier child.

In 1983 a case report appeared in the *BMJ* of a 2 year old child with chronic constipation which appeared to be due to cows' milk allergy. Now a report from Italy (*Journal of Pediatrics* 1995; 126: 34–9) describes the investigation of 27 children aged under 3 years in a paediatric gastroenterology clinic. All had 'idiopathic' chronic constipation and 21 of the 27 were cured on a cows' milk free diet. In those who responded, their bowel habit became normal within three days and symptoms reappeared within 48 hours of reintroducing milk. About 75% of the responders had a history of other manifestations interpreted as being due to cows' milk allergy. The authors suggest a double blind trial to confirm their results.