Lucina had supposed that young children might be reluctant to wear glasses. Observations in Reading, however, suggest that she was wrong (Eye 1998;12:173–8). Children under age 8 years accepted spectacles well and acceptance was related to the social environment and the comments of other children rather than improvement in vision. Rude comments were apparently rare in this age group but were perhaps more likely at around the time of school entry—that might not be a good time to supply spectacles for the first time.

In a US/UK study (New England Journal of Medicine 1998;338:1572–6) 409 babies with birth weights less than 1251 g and less than 31 weeks’ gestation were randomly assigned to wear goggles that reduced visible light by 97% and ultraviolet light by 100%, or no goggles. There was no effect on the incidence of retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) (goggles 54%, controls 58%). An editorialist (Ibid:1620–1) accepts that this proves that light does not cause ROP but asks whether the goggles might help once ROP has begun to develop.

Two girls aged 6 and 8 years developed multiple tender pink or violaceous nodules or papules on the soles of their feet after ballet classes (Pediatric Dermatology 1998;15:97–102). They had palmoplantar eccrine hidradenitis (otherwise known as idiopathic planter hidradenitis, neutrophilic eccrine hidradenitis, recurrent palmoplantar hidradenitis in children, or idiopathic palmoplantar hidradenitis). The condition has only been recognised in the past 10 years. It comes on after running, dancing, or walking, and usually affects both feet although it may be unilateral and the palms are sometimes involved. Histology shows neutrophilic infiltration round the sweat glands. No treatment is proved to be effective but the lesions usually resolve spontaneously in about a week although they may recur.

A leading article in the British Journal of Surgery (1998;85:580–1) comes out against skull x rays for children with blunt head injury unless non-accidental injury is suspected, or there is a penetrating injury or a depressed fracture. Otherwise a skull x ray does not contribute anything useful to the care of the child. The author acknowledges, however, that there could still be legal complications if, for instance, a child is sent home from the emergency department without x ray and is subsequently found to have an intracranial bleed. The probability though, is that the courts would support a practice accepted by the profession.

A US national study of compensation claims for acute encephalopathy after measles vaccination (Pediatrics 1998;101:383–7) identified 48 cases with a clustering around 8–9 days after vaccination. The probable incidence, however, was about one in 1.5 million children vaccinated.

Crops such as peas, maize, and potatoes are susceptible to fungal infections. One way of combating such infections might be to spray the crops with a bacterium, Burkholderia cepacia, and firms in the USA and Canada would like to do just that (New Scientist 1998;23 May:5). The trouble is that B cepacia can be lethal to people with cystic fibrosis and, although the firms claim that their strain is non-pathogenic, British and American microbiologists have pointed out that the bacterium is capable of mutation and its safety is in considerable doubt. It seems unlikely that the plan will get past the regulatory agencies but the whole story gives Lucina that sinking feeling.

In 1966 a peculiar pattern of eczema, characterised by exudation and crustng around the nostrils, ears, and scalp, with the later appearance of a generalised fine papular rash, was described in Jamaican children and called infective dermatitis (ID). In 1990 all of 14 children with ID were found to be seropositive for human T lymphomrophic virus type 1 (HTLV-1). Now a further study in Jamaica of 50 children with ID and 35 with atopic dermatitis (Archives of Dermatology 1998;134:439–44. See also Editorial Ibid: 487–8) has confirmed the association with HTLV-1 (seropositivity, ID 100%, atopic dermatitis 14%). Further characteristics of ID were lymphadenopathy, raised immunoglobulin levels, activated T cells with high rates of HLA-DR antigen positivity, high CD4 and CD8 cell counts, and raised CD4:CD8 ratio. Whether these children will later develop adult T cell leukaemia/lungoma is not known.

A live attenuated influenza vaccine given intranasally to 15–71 month old American children (New England Journal of Medicine 1998;338:1405–12) had an efficacy of 89% after one dose and 94% after two doses. There was a 30% drop in episodes of febrile otitis media in vaccinated children. The researchers imply that more widespread vaccination of children might be indicated but an editorialist (Ibid: 1459–61) favours caution in that respect.