

Canada Council grant to study the impact of sociologically inappropriate child models in nursery rhymes — such as Peter Pumpkin Eater, Little Miss Muffet, Little Jack Horner and similar diminutive persons — on the dietary proclivities of contemporary youth. Such work would no doubt disclose a close correlation between the careless ingesting of subliminal messages in nursery rhymes and the eating disorders rampant among children today. Such research should be conducted in a controlled foreign environment (e.g., southern France) while dining on roast beef or similar rich red meat (cf. Jack in the Beanstalk), excellent red wine, cheesecake or deep-dish apple pie à la mode, and culinarily appropriate liqueurs.

S. Grant Bartlett
Orangeville, Ont.

Reference

1. Giles SM, Shea S. Head injuries in nursery rhymes: evidence of a dangerous subtext in children's literature. *CMAJ* 2003;169(12):1294-6.

Competing interests: An interest in sailing may indicate a previously unidentified psychological disorder from "rowing my boat" and crewing with "three men in a tub."

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Sarah Giles and Sarah Shea¹ suggest that nursery rhymes give children the wrong impression of what is required in providing medical assistance for head injury, but their research is slightly off balance. So-called nursery rhymes did not arise in the nursery. Instead, they came from the street entertainers of the time and often refer to current events.

For example, "Ring a Ring of Rosies" is doggerel made up during the Great Plague of London: "the ring of roses" is what people hung on their doors to display that plague was in the house, "a pocket full of posies" is what people carried with them to ward off the plague, "atishoo, atishoo" meant that you had the plague, and "all fall down," that you were dead.

"Jack and Jill," another rhyme mentioned by Giles and Shea,¹ refers to King John losing the Crown Jewels in the north of England in the early 13th

century, which gives a clue to the age of this rhyme.

To continue their light-hearted research, Giles and Shea could look into the historical content of these rhymes.

Sarah S. Warren
Woodford, London, UK

Reference

1. Giles SM, Shea S. Head injuries in nursery rhymes: evidence of a dangerous subtext in children's literature. *CMAJ* 2003;169(12):1294-6.

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Sarah Giles and Sarah Shea,¹ in their article about head injuries in nursery rhymes, perpetuate the common belief that "Ring Around the Rosie" and its variants are retellings of Black Plague stories, including preventive measures. However, according to the Urban Legends References Pages (www.snopes.com/language/literary/rosie.htm), this nursery rhyme, "of indefinite origin and no specific meaning," has no traceable

connection to the Plague. Rather, it is just a "[collection] of words and sounds that someone thought sounded good together."

D. Keith Howington
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Reference

1. Giles SM, Shea S. Head injuries in nursery rhymes: evidence of a dangerous subtext in children's literature. *CMAJ* 2003;169(12):1294-6.

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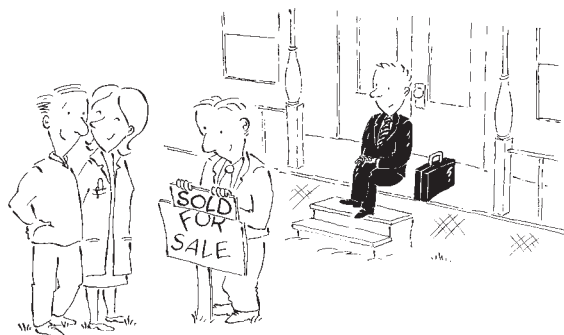
Correction

In the article "Drug company experts advised staff to withhold data about SSRI use in children" (*CMAJ* 2004;170 [5]:783) we incorrectly reported the number of Canadian children taking SSRIs. In fact 3 million Canadians (children and adults) take SSRIs.

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