venous bolus of insulin at the initiation of insulin therapy.

Many children present to emergency departments staffed by physicians who have a wealth of experience in the management of adult patients with diabetic ketoacidosis but who may not be familiar with the different management considerations required for children and adolescents with this condition. We feel it is important to increase awareness of the more conservative fluid management recommended for pediatric patients, in the hope that this may decrease the incidence of cerebral edema and improve outcomes.

Sarah Lawrence
Danièle Paccaud
Heather Dean
Margaret Lawson
Denis Daneman
Pediatric Section
Clinical Practice Guideline Expert Committee
Canadian Diabetes Association
Toronto, Ont.

References

[One of the authors responds:]

Sarah Lawrence and colleagues are correct: our paper addresses hyperglycemic decompensation in adults only. This was clearly stated in the introduction in an early version of the manuscript, but the information was inadvertently omitted from the final, shortened version. However, the target age group is mentioned in the caption for Fig. 2 of our article.

Jean-Louis Chiasson
Head, Research Group on Diabetes and Metabolic Regulation
Université de Montréal
Montréal, Que.

Reference

Opt out, not opt in

According to a document recently published by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,1 the province of Ontario, which uses an opt-in approach to prenatal screening for HIV infection, had an abysmal testing rate of only 54%. Such a low rate is clearly unacceptable. Critics of the opt-out strategy argue that it eliminates a woman’s autonomy and that it is unethical to perform such an important test without true informed consent. However, given that antiretroviral therapy in HIV-positive pregnant women can potentially reduce vertical transmission rates from about 25% to less than 2%, as reported by Sharon Walmsley in her recent commentary,2 is there really any argument for continuing to offer testing on an opt-in basis?

Mark H. Yudin
Obstetrics, Gynecology, & Reproductive Infectious Diseases
St. Michael’s Hospital
Toronto, Ont.

References

The drivers of self-discharge

Richard Saitz suggests that intravenous drug use, dates of distribution of welfare cheques and other factors may be reasons for patients wanting to be discharged from hospital against doctors’ orders.1

But has Saitz ever been a patient on an acute care surgical ward? I was admitted to hospital for removal of my gallbladder, which led to an 8-day stay because full open surgery and insertion of a Jackson-Pratt drain were required. Besides the abominable food and resultant hunger and acid reflux, the constant noise (beeping IV pumps and ringing telephones) prevented sleep, day or night. The nurses were fantastic but should have been issued roller skates. Around 4 am there was generally a lull and I was able to doze off, only to be awakened by someone pushing the door open to see if I was OK. Getting back to sleep was almost impossible. Add to all this the patient down the hall who was smoking in his room (I am allergic to smoke), and you can understand why I announced on day 8 that if the doctor did not sign my discharge, I intended to discharge myself.

Anne Sutton Brown
Montréal, Que.

Reference

[The author responds:]

Anne Sutton Brown’s experience does not invalidate the systematic observations made in methodologically rigorous studies such as that by Anis and associates1 or in other work that I cited in drawing my conclusions.2 Nonetheless, these studies are clearly not representative of all experiences. For example, the experiences of HIV-positive patients in Vancouver may not apply to patients undergoing gallbladder surgery in Montréal, and vice versa.

As I stated in my editorial,2 “the most important void in the literature on discharges against medical advice is the..."
lack of understanding of why … . Patients need to be interviewed to find out what motivates them to leave.” To fill this gap in the literature, data should be collected systematically, from diverse patient samples and in methodologically sound studies. Some — perhaps many — of the patients in those samples will confirm what Brown has reported. In the meantime, I see no reason to wait to act on the data already provided by high-quality research, which suggest that we should address addictions properly in patients who have them.

Richard Saitz
Associate Professor of Medicine and Epidemiology
Boston University Schools of Medicine and Public Health
Boston, Mass.

References

A practical case

I’d like to thank CMAJ for printing Robert Slinger and Theodore Scholten’s article about the boy with a botfly infestation.1 I experienced a similar history for 11 weeks after my vacation. The correct diagnosis had been missed, and I was booked for removal of a sebaceous cyst. Then my husband, who is also a physician, read the case report and, suspecting that a botfly infestation might be the problem, extracted a 2.4-cm larva from my scalp.

If one of the reasons for printing unusual case studies is to help physicians, then this article certainly filled the bill. I just never suspected that I would be the patient!

Naomi Sato
General Practitioner
Mississauga, Ont.

Reference

National Network of Libraries for Health

In their article on technology-enabled knowledge translation, Kendall Ho and colleagues emphasize physicians’ need to “locate and access evidence to support decision-making.” Organizing information, particularly electronic information, is exactly what libraries do, and we commend the initiative that Ho and colleagues describe.

The Canadian Health Libraries Association has proposed a National Network of Libraries for Health, which would build on existing resources and ensure universal access to licensed publications available through the Web. The proposal was recognized in the Romanow report2 and is supported by Health Canada, the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information, the Association of Canadian Medical Colleges, the US National Library of Medicine and the Canadian Cochrane Network and Centre. However, it has not yet been funded.

Jessie McGowan
Co-Chair
Jim Henderson
Member
Patrick Ellis
Co-Chair
Task Force for the National Network of Libraries for Health
Canadian Health Libraries Association
Toronto, Ont.

References

Creating immunity

The argument in a CMAJ editorial3 that “Unless a large proportion (usually over 95%) of the population is vaccinated, herd immunity will not result and outbreaks will recur” had me scratching my head. The same editorial notes that “the near-complete immunization of whole populations in childhood has led, decades later, to whole populations of adults with waning immunity to some childhood diseases,” giving as an example pertussis, which

[One of the authors responds:]

The notion that libraries are integral to evidence-based decision-making for health care professionals is well worth emphasizing. Librarians have tremendous expertise in searching the literature, devising and refining search strategies, and pinpointing the evidence, activities that usually involve the use of modern information and communication technologies, such as those we described.1 Physicians and, for that matter, all health care professionals, can benefit from librarians’ expertise and from their coaching as they acquire these important skills themselves.

The Division of Continuing Medical Education within the University of British Columbia Faculty of Medicine has been offering workshops to help physicians in using the Internet for evidence-based medicine, and librarians have been members of the workshop faculty since the inception of these courses. Similar approaches are being used across Canada and internationally.2 An even more interesting model is the integration of librarians or information specialists into the clinical setting for team-based practice and learning.3