Encore

*Klebsiella pneumoniae*, HLA-B27, and ankylosing spondylitis

Many groups have looked long and hard at cross reactivity between various organisms, particularly klebsiella, and the HLA-B27 antigen. The results of various studies have given rise to debate: enthusiasm by some and scepticism by others. This study showed that all the HLA-B27 positive patients studied who had synovial inflammation showed cross reactivity between *Klebsiella*. 1 and klebsiella nitrogenase epitopes. They suggested that the putative cross reactive epitope forms part of the HLA-B27 molecule itself.


**Backache, smoking, and car driving**

Backache is a common and troublesome complaint causing much disability and loss of time from work. There are many risk factors, among them being exposure to vibrations at a frequency of 5 Hz. This may explain why people who spend much time travelling in cars so often suffer from backache, though the design of car seats may also have something to do with it too. One suspects. Heavy lifting is of course a well known risk factor, but surprisingly so is smoking cigarettes. This has been shown to be independent of other factors and may be due to impairment of the blood supply to the nerve roots and indirectly to the nutrition of the intervertebral disc. Yet another good reason to stop smoking. This observation has also been noted in the Hanes II survey.


**Osteoarthritis and smoking**

Smoking is associated with so many extra and avoidable health risks that it comes as something of a big surprise to find that it may actually *protect* against a disease. This article, however, produces some interesting and reasonable evidence that smoking, or something closely associated with it, confers a modest protection against the development of osteoarthritis of the knee. This observer prefers to take his chances, however, and continue as a fervent non-smoker, nevertheless.


**Analgesic nephropathy**

A multicentre study from North Carolina again showed the dangers to kidney function of prolonged use of analgesics in high dose. Phenacetin (now withdrawn from the market) is the worst offender, but its metabolite acetaminophen is also associated with renal damage. Aspirin by itself can probably be exonerated, though as an accompanying leader points out the reliance in this study on creatinine clearance as a measure of renal failure may underestimate the prevalence of renal impairment. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs in prolonged high dose may not be risk free in this regard either, though this is as yet not proved. Smoking and caffeine intake are compounding factors, and the problem is world wide.


**CREST and digital nerve calcification**

Scleroderma is not usually associated with neurological problems, though they have been reported. Sclerosis of the radial digital nerve of the index finger is, however, described in a recent issue of *the Journal of Hand Surgery*. As the authors point out, neurological involvement is more usually due to microangiopathy or perineural fibrosis. This report seems to be unique.


**Spinal stenosis: MRI or contact CT imaging?**

Cervical and lumbar disc disease in patients is an all too common reason for outpatient referral. A significant minority may have spinal stenosis: what is the best imaging method to help evaluate this, MRI or CT scanning? The Californian report suggests that there is not much to choose between them when identifying spinal stenosis, but MRI is better at picking out disc degeneration. The problem is that MRI is as yet far from universally available.


**A new sign for scleroderma**

When patients with scleroderma extend their neck they may exhibit ridging and tightening of the skin. These longitudinal ridges appear along the sides of the neck and feel taught. In this article an Australian physician describes this as a new and helpful sign.