

Reviews	79	Review of the role of non-invasive ventilation in the emergency department <i>A M Cross</i>
	86	Discharge instructions for emergency department patients: what should we provide? <i>D McD Taylor, P A Cameron</i>
Original articles	91	Foreign bodies in the nose and ear: a review of techniques for removal in the emergency department <i>P H Davies, J R Bengler</i>
	95	Survey of the use of rapid sequence induction in the accident and emergency department <i>A Walker, J Brenchley</i>
	98	Characteristics of children and adolescents presenting to accident and emergency departments with deliberate self harm <i>A Nadkarni, A Parkin, N Dogra, D D Stretch, P Adrian Evans</i>
	103	Triage nurse requested x rays—are they worthwhile? <i>M Lindley-Jones, B J Finlayson</i>
	108	Triage nurse requested x rays—the results of a national survey <i>M Lindley-Jones, B J Finlayson</i>
	111	Complications of tube thoracostomy in trauma <i>R C Bailey</i>
	115	Chemical protective clothing; a study into the ability of staff to perform lifesaving procedures <i>Mark J Coates, Ayman S Jundi, Mark R James</i>
	119	Public understanding of medical terminology: non-English speakers may not receive optimal care <i>M W Cooke, S Wilson, P Cox, A Roalfe</i>
	122	Activities of accident and emergency consultants—a time and motion study <i>R Brown</i>
Best evidence topic reports	126	Towards evidence based emergency medicine: best BETS from the Manchester Royal Infirmary <i>Edited by K Mackway-Jones</i>
	126	Signs and symptoms of oesophageal coins <i>V Choudhery, S Maurice</i>
	127	Immobilisation of suspected scaphoid fractures <i>K Gow, R Williams</i>
	128	Activated charcoal in tricyclic antidepressant overdose <i>C Park, K Richell-Herren</i>
	128	Analgesia and assessment of abdominal pain <i>K Mackway-Jones, M Harrison</i>
Journal scan	130	Journal scan <i>Edited by J Wardrope; this scan coordinated by P Davies and A Mattick</i>
Special report	133	Mentoring—the trainee's perspective <i>C D Okereke</i>
Historical note	136	Discovery of the intraosseous route for fluid administration <i>B A Foëx</i>
Case reports	138	Domestic violence: the shaken adult syndrome <i>T D Carrigan, E Walker, S Barnes</i>
	139	Airbag associated fatal head injury: case report and review of the literature on airbag injuries <i>K Cunningham, T D Brown, E Gradwell, P A Nee</i>
	143	Anaphylaxis and monoamine oxidase inhibitors—the use of adrenaline <i>M J Fenwick, C L Muwanga</i>
	144	Prolonged coma due to cerebral fat embolism: report of two cases <i>L Gregorakos, K Sakayianni, D Hroni, V Harizopoulou, N Markou, F Georgiadou, M Adamidou</i>
	147	Air rifle injury to the oropharynx. The essential role of computed tomography in deciding on surgical exploration <i>T Hung, P Huchzermeyer, A E Hinton</i>
	149	A useful form of glue ear <i>J R Bengler, P H Davies</i>
Emergency casebook	151	Asymptomatic cerebellar medulloblastoma unmasked by minor head injury <i>J J McInerney, A J Colquhoun, G G Bodiwala</i>

Letters to the editor	152	Intramuscular or intravenous adrenaline in acute, severe anaphylaxis? <i>A F T Brown</i>
	152	Medical treatment of anaphylaxis <i>M Gavalas, C Walford, A Sadana, C O'Donnell; Reply D Chamberlain on behalf of the Anaphylaxis Project Team</i>
	153	Future inpatient management of patients with minor head injuries <i>G McCarthy, G Quin</i>
	153	Cycle helmets <i>A Fraser-Moodie</i>
	154	Playing in the back seat <i>M G Jenkins, M Rao</i>
	154	Oesophageal rupture <i>S Doherty</i>
	154	Carbon monoxide poisoning <i>S Doherty; Reply M Turner</i>
	154	Evidence based and guideline based medicine <i>T Carrigan</i>
	155	Weekly web review <i>G Lloyd</i>

	156	<i>Emergency Medicine</i> contents page
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In this issue

Review of the role of non-invasive ventilation in the emergency department

Non-invasive ventilation (CPAP and BiPAP) is frequently used in Australian emergency departments as part of the treatment for severe respiratory distress. It appears to dramatically speed clinical improvement in the emergency department and reduce the need for intubation. Many studies have demonstrated its effectiveness in intensive care units. This paper reviews the existing evidence for the use of non-invasive ventilation and proposes some guidelines for its use in the emergency department. Many questions remain about its optimal use but there is little doubt that emergency physicians will use it with increasing frequency (see p 79).

Survey of the use of rapid sequence induction in the A&E department

There is currently debate about the practice of rapid sequence induction by emergency physicians in the UK. This survey was designed to assess current attitudes of both anaesthetists and A&E consultants to this procedure. The results show wide variation both within and between disciplines. A proportion of A&E departments are already providing this service either routinely or when an anaesthetist is unavailable.

There is scope for much discussion on the training required for initial competence and skill maintenance (see p 95).

Complications of tube thoracostomy in trauma

Established safe practice is for traumatic pneumothoraces to be drained via the

insertion of a chest drain. This procedure is thought to have a substantial complication rate. The complication rate of tube thoracostomy performed using the blunt, semiopen technique has not been assessed and may be considerably different to that encountered when more traditional closed methods of insertion were popular. This retrospective case series assesses the complication rate of tube thoracostomy in a large UK teaching hospital over a one year period. The results suggest that the blunt technique of tube thoracostomy has eliminated many of the more serious complications traditionally associated with the procedure. This paper does not support a selective reduction in the indications for tube thoracostomy in trauma. A larger study to confirm or refute these findings is needed before any change in safe, established practice (see p 111).

Public understanding of medical terminology

Triage and diagnosis rely on accurate history taking, which is dependent on the patient's comprehension of the questions asked. Cooke *et al* have demonstrated that a high percentage of people do not understand the term unconscious, which is used by both ambulance and A&E triage systems to determine priority. The understanding was worse in those whose first language was not English but was highly variable within ethnic groups. They propose that strategies need to be developed to ensure correct responses are achieved (see p 119).