

# RES MEDICA

Journal of the Royal Medical Society



## Journal Scan

### The Editor

### Abstract

A review of recent periodicals has revealed some articles of interest.

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# Journal Scan

A review of recent periodicals has revealed some articles of interest.

"Voice of the Castrato". This article by Professor J.S.Jenkins of the department of medical history (*The Lancet* 1998, 351:1877-1880) explains the induction of male hypogonadism to preserve the male unbroken voice into adult life and how its popularity was such that in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century the unique pitch of the castrato dominated opera throughout most of western Europe.

The sound of the castrato voice resulted from the high pitch of a child's vocal chords associated with fully grown resonating chambers produced by the pharynx and oral cavity as well as the adult thoracic cavity. A contemporary critic described the castrato sound as being "as clear and penetrating as that of a choirboy's but a great deal louder with something dry and sour about it yet brilliant, light, full of impact". The author goes on to describe the physical appearance of the castrato and a documentation of the rise and fall of these unique artists.

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"The Evolution of the Menopause" appeared in *Nature* 329: 759-761 (P.W.Sherman 1998). Here, the author explores four theories to explain the menopause. The first idea is that menopause occurs because women live longer now than in the past. Most animals reproduce as long as they live, but zoo species (whose lifespans have been artificially increased) often stop reproducing before they die. Therefore the

menopause is a result of medically lengthening the lifespan of a primate with a fixed number of gametes.

Secondly, it may be explained by the deterioration of a physiological process that was once well regulated; like eyesight and memory this process fails with age.

The third theory proposes that the menopause is an adaptive process in that it is an evolutionary mechanism to protect against birth defects which increase with age.

The final explanation involves a concept called the "Good Mother" theory. This proposes that the ability to reproduce later in life may mean that the mother will not be able to care adequately for her offspring as a younger mother and she would also be risking the future of her existing children. The good mother theory is therefore an adaptive theory which allows a mother to devote her attention to her existing young to ensure that more offspring will grow up to reproduce themselves. Supporting this theory are several species in which females live beyond their last pregnancy including Japanese macaques, elephants and killer whales where offspring require extensive maternal care.

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"Gastrointestinal Emergencies in Marathon Runners". *The New Zealand Medical Journal*

(Scobie B.A. June 1998:211-212) presents the cases of two marathon runners who developed gastrointestinal emergencies during a competitive run. The first patient, a 35 year old female collapsed near the end of her race with abdominal cramps. At laparotomy the left half of the greater omentum was found to be infarcted and was resected. Further surgery due to persisting peritonism revealed that the remainder of the greater omentum was infarcted and an acute oedematous pancreatitis was found.

The second athlete was a 27 year old male. After 10 km he collapsed semi-comatose and

was found to be hypoglycaemic (blood glucose 2.0 mmol/l). Following intravenous resuscitation he regained consciousness but registered a temperature of 39.5°C. He developed D.I.C., rhabdomyolysis, renal shutdown and progressive hepatic failure. His condition stabilised following dialysis, however, his hepatic function declined and died on the 32<sup>nd</sup> day.

The authors examine the pathological processes in the two cases and suggest that they provide support for ischaemia being a major contributor to GI catastrophes in marathon runners.

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# Interrupted Fertility

From "A case by Dr. Taylor, 1777".

This case history was resurrected from the societies archives by C .Vaughn Ruckley.

Mrs Buff, wife of Mr Buff, silk weaver in Fashion Street in Spitafields, London, aged twenty-seven years the mother of several children, on 27<sup>th</sup> of July 1774, having gone her usual time of pregnancy, was attended by her midwife several days, but the labour pains ceasing, the midwife left her promising to return soon but did not fulfil her promise. Mrs B. not being delivered of her child, thought she might have a month longer to go and went about her domestic affairs as usual. Christmas following she prov'd with child again and not being delivered of the former one she became uncommonly big and unwieldy, she applied to

several physicians for advice and particularly to Dr. Wyman an eminent man midwife in Aldermanbury, who ordered her a variety of purgative medicines but without relief. In June she sent for me, and after hearing the above narrative I assured her of being with child and in October following I laid her of a healthy living child. Having had an easy natural labour, she recovered very well until the tenth day, she was taken of a violent purging, her stools very offensive and of a dark bloody appearance, having taken some astrigent medicines with Diascordium and Diarrhoea ceas'd but was followed by profuse sweats