

EDITORS' NOTE

Inside the March/April 2008 Issue and the Most Frequently-Read Articles in 2007

Unraveling the Mysteries of Patient Complaints

The 2008 March/April issue of the *Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine (JABFM)* highlights new data about several common yet disturbing symptoms we see in family medicine for which medical care has not yet provided adequate solutions.

Night Sweats

We have a long way to go to understand both sleep disorders and night sweats. Reporting sweating at night is rarely related to fevers, as many of us learned in medical school, but people with night sweats have many sleep complaints and feel sleepier. Yet, as Mold¹ reports, these sleep complaints are not associated with verifiable sleep disturbances by traditional measures in formal sleep studies. Something is happening for these people, and more effort should go toward truly measuring and understanding the meaning of their symptoms and to help them get relief. Is this depression talking? If so, what aspects of sleep studies could help verify this?

Sleep

A big problem. Sometimes simple answers. Often not. As Sorscher² found, family physicians often do not include sleep questions on routine intake questionnaires. Do we fear the potential “yes” answer? The major apparent choices: 1) controlled, potentially addictive medicines which physicians are berated for using, and for which insurance companies make us fill out extra forms or make more phone calls; or 2) difficult life changes by patients. To make matters worse, “insomnia” is not always considered a reimbursable service for family physicians (apparently, it is considered a mental health diagnosis that some insurers say requires a mental health professional). Sometimes simple answers. Often not.

Chest Pain

We admit many patients with acute chest pain who are subsequently not found to have an acute cardiac

event, and various attempts have been made to make this sorting process more accurate and rapid. Despite new laboratory studies plus more and more data on risk factors, occasionally patients are still sent home who later have an event and die. Crawford et al³ evaluated the utility of the American College of Cardiology/American Heart Association guidelines for the management of patients with unstable angina and non-ST-segment elevation myocardial infarction. Conducted in a military hospital with a low percentage of patients having positive troponins and high likelihood of follow-up the finding that a major clinical practice guideline did not perform better than routine clinical judgment suggests no significant benefit to requiring the specific validated guideline in their setting.

Chronic Pain Treated with Opioids

Fleming and coauthors⁴ provide data on an enigmatic population—patients with chronic pain that family physicians have decided to treat with long-term opioids. They report that low to medium dosing is associated with higher quality of life than high dosing. Finding the happy medium between improved pain control and side effects of the medicines is an important but not always simple task.

Counseling to Increase Exercise

Carroll⁵ reminds us of the need to be specific in our counseling for physical activity, yet it was uncommon for family physicians to include all 5 “A’s”: Ask, Advise, Agree, Assist, and Arrange. The daunting challenge of helping patients incorporate routine exercise into their lives suggest that this more comprehensive approach would be useful.

Eating Behaviors Associated with Obesity

Greenwood et al⁶ suggest that we help patients with obesity by emphasizing a few simple known items about food behaviors that contribute to obesity. By providing a limited number of easily understood and actionable facts, the message may be clearer and more effective.

Conflict of interest: The authors are editors and staff of the *JABFM*.

Table 1. The 20 Most Frequently Read* Articles in the *JABFM* during January 2007 through December 2007†

1. Margaret M. Eberl, Chester H. Fox, Stephen B. Edge, Cathleen A. Carter, and Martin C. Mahoney BI-RADS Classification for Management of Abnormal Mammograms (14)‡
2. Anthony A. Mork, Scott M. W. Haufe, and William B. Yancey Sometimes (What Seems to Be) A Heart Attack Is (Really) A Pain In The Neck (15)‡
3. John W. Ely, Colleen M. Kennedy, Elizabeth C. Clark, and Noelle C. Bowdler Abnormal Uterine Bleeding: A Management Algorithm (16)‡
4. John W. Ely, Jerome A. Osherooff, M. Lee Chambliss, and Mark H. Ebell Approach to Leg Edema of Unclear Etiology (17)‡
5. John A. Astin, Shauna L. Shapiro, David M. Eisenberg, and Kelly L. Forys Mind-Body Medicine: State of the Science, Implications for Practice (18)‡
6. Mounzer Y. Kassab, Arshad Majid, Muhammad U. Farooq, Hend Azhary, Linda A. Hershey, Edward M. Bednarczyk, Dion F. Graybeal, and Mark D. Johnson Transcranial Doppler: An Introduction for Primary Care Physicians (31)
7. Robert Oh Practical Applications of Fish Oil (Ω-3 Fatty Acids) in Primary Care (19)‡
8. Tamara J. Dominguez It's Not a Spider Bite, It's Community-Acquired Methicillin-Resistant <i>Staphylococcus aureus</i> (20)‡
9. Rade N. Pejic and Daniel T. Lee Hypertriglyceridemia (21)‡
10. Erika N. Ringdahl, Susan L. Pereira, and John E. Delzell Treatment of Primary Insomnia (22)‡
11. Alan B. Douglass and Edward T. Bope Evaluation and Treatment of Posterior Neck Pain in Family Practice (23)‡
12. Peter A. Rives and Alan B. Douglass Evaluation and Treatment of Low Back Pain in Family Practice (24)‡
13. Saili Desai, Diana Aldea, Elisabeth Daneels, Manal Soliman, Amy S. Braksmajer, and Colin P. Kopes-Kerr Chronic Addiction to Dextromethorphan Cough Syrup: A Case Report (32)
14. Lee T. Dresang A Molar Pregnancy Detected by Following β-Human Chorionic Gonadotropin Levels after a First Trimester Loss (27)
15. John P. Geyman The Corporate Transformation of Medicine and Its Impact on Costs and Access to Care (29)
16. Dwenda Gjerdingen The Effectiveness of Various Postpartum Depression Treatments and the Impact of Antidepressant Drugs on Nursing Infants (25)‡
17. Andre F. Lijoi and Joanna Brady Vasa Previa Diagnosis and Management (28)
18. Mark B. Stephens, Debra A. Manning, Amy Arnold-Canuso, and David M. Haas Maternal Shoe Size and Infant Birth Weight: Correlation or Fiction? (34)
19. Neil R. Holland and Calin I. Prodan Peripheral Neuropathy and "Borderline" Diabetes (30)
20. Jose A. Lopez and Douglas Reich Choroid Plexus Cysts (33)

*The most-read rankings are recalculated at the beginning of each month. Rankings are based on hits received by articles archived on the *JABFM* website only.

†Data source: "The 20 Most Frequently Read Articles" for the *JABFM*, January 2007 through December 2007, HighWire Press; updated monthly, last on January 8, 2008 (accessed January 14, 2008).

‡This article was also on the 2006 list of "The 20 Most Read Articles" (13)

Antibiotics without a Prescription

As noted in our recent Global Theme Issue on Poverty and Human Development,⁷ patients unnecessarily taking antibiotics without a prescription may well contribute to worldwide antibiotic resis-

tance.⁸ In a focus group study, Mainous et al⁹ found Latino adults, particularly those from countries with fewer restrictions on antibiotics, regularly took unprescribed antibiotics and were not aware of the potential problems. Patients often perceived

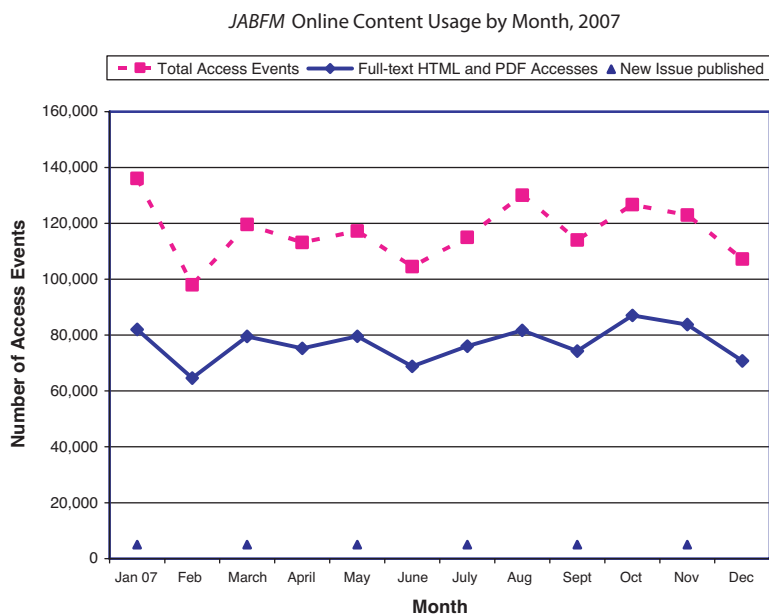


Figure 1. Data source: “Year-to-Date Usage Summary” for the *JABFM*, HighWire Press, produced January 8, 2008 (accessed January 14, 2008).

it as easier to obtain antibiotics than go to the doctor especially when they believed the antibiotics would improve their symptoms.

This *JABFM* issue also provides interesting clinical discussions of a case of large and recurrent keloids,¹⁰ the lack of an apparent relationship between serum chromium levels and the development of diabetes during pregnancy,¹¹ and brucellosis with sacroiliitis.¹²

The relevance of articles in this current issue seem particularly high—every single article can be related to at least one patient seen in the office on one routine day.

Top 20 *JABFM* Online Articles in 2007

Table 1 shows the 20 *JABFM* articles most frequently read in 2007. Rankings are based on hits received by articles archived on the *JABFM* website only. Remarkably, 12 of these 20 were also on the 2006 list of most frequently accessed articles.¹³ The 12 articles with impressive staying power (on both the 2006 and 2007 list of the top 20 most frequently read articles) were by Eberl et al¹⁴; Mork et al¹⁵; Ely et al¹⁶; another Ely et al¹⁷; Astin et al¹⁸; Oh¹⁹; Dominguez²⁰; Pejic and Lee²¹; Ringdahl et al²²; Douglass and Bope²³; Rives and Douglass²⁴; and Gjerdingen.²⁵

Lee Dresang had an evidence-based colposcopy update in the *JABFM* top 20 in 2006²⁶ and another article on molar pregnancy on the 2007 top 20 list (both were published in 2005).²⁷

Three papers published in 2003 or 2004 and most read in 2007 were not on the 2006 most read list; some papers seem to regain interest, probably because of other events in medicine. They were: the Lijoi and Brady²⁸ article on vasa previa diagnosis and management; the Geyman²⁹ commentary on the corporate transformation of medicine and its impact on costs and access to care; and the Holland and Prodan³⁰ study of peripheral neuropathy and “borderline” diabetes.

Several more recent articles attracted heavy readership in 2007. These included a review article by Kassab³¹ on transcranial dopplers. Clinical case reports with literatures reviews by family medicine authors continue to attract readers: Desai³² on addiction to dextromethorphan; Dresang²⁷ on a molar pregnancy; Lijoi²⁸ on vasa previa; and Lopez³³ on choroid plexus cysts. Readers also enjoyed a brief report on maternal shoe size and infant birth weight (Stephens).³⁴

Content Usage

Figure 1 illustrates online content usage for 2007. With an average of 117,000 requests for content per month, this is the first year the *JABFM* has reached the 1 million mark in total content access events. Even with the rise in content usage over the last year, the *JABFM* experienced a 32% decrease (since 2006) in homepage viewings, which suggests that users are accessing content by using different methods (ie, e-

mail alerts of new issue table of contents, or via indexing services and search engines).

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