

DEHUMANISING HOSPITAL WARDS

British hospitals, still reeling from the bureaucratic edict that banned flowers from hospital wards, have now been informed that sitting on patients' beds — by either visitors or clinicians — is also prohibited. In the name of infection control, hospital wards in the United Kingdom are being progressively dehumanised and becoming sterile and austere places. These edicts join a previous bureaucratic direction that doctors should not wear ties on hospital wards, as such sartorial ornaments may be vehicles for cross-infection.

Commenting in the *BMJ* on the latest prohibition on ward behaviour, Iona Heath, a London-based general practitioner and medical columnist, argues that there is *"no hard evidence for either of these demeaning prohibitions ... Doctors should never be discouraged from sitting, because patients consistently estimate that they have been given more time when the doctor sits down rather than stands ... Some of the most intimate and effective interactions between doctor and patient that I have either witnessed or experienced have occurred while the doctor has been sitting on the patient's bed."**

Furthermore, the ban seems to affect even patients who are dying, and these cold and imperious commandments may simply be *"all in the interests of being seen to be doing something very noticeable about the worrying levels of hospital based infections, however ineffective and otherwise disruptive"*. Heath concludes that *"rules that mostly diminish the joys of life rather than enhance them ... unless absolutely necessary, have no place in hospitals, where joy is too often in short supply"*.

The interesting question is: could such bureaucratic bulldozing directives occur locally? The UK's National Health Service is a monopolistic organisation that holds the purse strings for payments to hospitals and doctors in practice, and it is controlled by a central and interventional bureaucracy. With the current talk of health and hospital reform in Australia, hopefully this will not be replicated here.



Martin B Van Der Weyden

*Heath I. Do not sit on the bed. *BMJ* 2010; 340: c1478.

LETTERS

An audit of pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza vaccine wastage in general practice

541 Caroline E Turnour, Stephen J Conaty, Michelle A Cretikos

Pandemic influenza testing at the coalface: time for reassessment?

541 David W Smith, David J Speers, Rodney A Bowman

Heterotopic pancreas causing intussusception in a child

542 Narotam R Jootun, Hock P Cheah, Siddath C Fernando, William S Munro, Martin Veysey

Pneumonia risk stratification in tropical Australia: does the SMART-COP score apply?

542 William B Grant

543 Joshua S Davis, Allen C Cheng, Bart J Currie, Nicholas M Anstey

Computerised prescribing: assessing the impact on prescription repeats and on generic substitution of some commonly used antibiotics

543 Joan V Henderson, Christopher M Harrison, Helena C Britt

544 David A Newby, Jane Robertson

SNAPSHOT

Dyspnoea caused by retained food in the oesophagus

Nicola Mumoli

CORRECTION

Early evidence for direct and indirect effects of the infant rotavirus vaccine program in Queensland

(*Med J Aust* 2009; 191: 157-160)

BOOK REVIEW

Older road users. Myths and realities, a guide for medical and legal professionals.

reviewed by Ilian Kamenoff

IN THIS ISSUE

IN OTHER JOURNALS



MJA Rapid Online Publication: denotes an article fast tracked for online publication.



March MJA BookClub Winner

Congratulations to Dr Okka Min, Alice Springs, who has won a \$150 MJA BookClub Voucher. Thanks to everyone who purchased books from the March *MJA BookClub*. Pictured left is Joseph Sing, AMPCo's National Advertising Manager, who drew March's winner.

For the latest and best from **all** medical publishers visit our secure online one-stop-shop at:

<http://shop.mja.com.au>. To see our new listings and find out about our great offer this month, see page 516 and the inside back cover of this issue.

