Elements: in this month’s issue

Should everyone have a right to treatment of their disease—how to appropriately assess expensive treatments for uncommon diseases

The QJM has been at the forefront of highlighting inequalities in medical care and challenging us as to contribute as valued members of society. In this issue of the journal we ask the important question—are the ways we assess cost effectiveness of common diseases appropriate for rarer diseases? Utilitarianism drives the assessment of those who regulate the provision of healthcare. It is easy to understand and is particularly attractive to those who want to compare health gain for treatments used in diverse groups of patients. This has led to the rolling out of common assessment tools such as a cost threshold per quality adjusted light years (QALY). The problem with these metrics is that one size does not fit all.

Gaucher’s disease is the commonest of the lysosomal storage diseases occurring in 1:20 000 births. There are specific treatments for this rare disease, which are expensive. In assessing this disease using cost threshold/QALY, no account is made of future healthcare savings with significantly less requirement for costly blood transfusions, splenectomy, analgesia, frequent hospitalization and joint replacement surgeries later in life.

Professor Tim Cox and his group in a Commentary in this Journal provide a persuasive argument for a broader disease-specific assessment process for rarer diseases. What value to humanity of restoring an individual to health? What value can we put on that individual fulfilling their potential and enriching the world we live in?

Chinese traditional medicine—why is it not part of our medical practice

Chinese medicine has a long and distinguished history stretching back over 5000 years. The world’s oldest medical text, the *Yellow Emperor’s Inner Canon*, is an ancient Chinese medical text that has been treated as the fundamental source for Chinese medicine for more than 2000 years.

Moxibustion is a traditional Chinese medicine therapy using *moxa* made from dried mugwort. Moxibustion and acupuncture have formed the basis for many of the therapeutic strategies in Chinese traditional medicine. One of the rate limiting steps that has limited the more widespread adoption of Chinese traditional medicine in the western world is the lack of universal standards. The lack of relevant standards has led to variable clinical results and oftentimes a lack of reproducibility of expected therapeutic efficacy. Hong and colleagues provide a review in the QJM of the current status of delivering standardization for Chinese traditional medicine and they also suggest definitive strategies that would allow the more universal adoption of these important therapeutic modalities.

Seamas C. Donnelly
Editor-in-Chief, QJM

References


© The Author 2014. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the Association of Physicians. All rights reserved. For Permissions, please email: journals.permissions@oup.com