

Osteoporosis rates among polio survivors

'Osteoporosis in a postpolio clinic population', a report of Canadian research by Dr Muriel Haziza and colleagues, appeared in the journal, *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation* in August 2007. The authors reviewed charts of 379 current patients at a Montreal clinic and studied the 164 patients who had had bone density tests of the lumbar spine and a hip. Muscle strength testing of patients' legs had also been carried out. The researchers found that osteoporosis of the spine was less common than osteoporosis of the hip; 32% of men tested had osteoporosis of the hip but only 10% were affected in the spine. Among post-menopausal women osteoporosis of the hip was present in 27% of cases and of the spine in 11%. (Among the small sample of premenopausal women the rates of osteoporosis were 9% for the hip and 6% for the spine). Thus osteoporosis was regional rather than generalised among the majority of these polio survivors. A significant relationship was found between bone density of the hip and muscle strength of the associated leg. Participants with osteoporosis of the hip had weaker leg muscles than other patients in the study. The weaker patients' leg muscles were the more likely they were to have osteoporosis of that hip. When the rates of osteoporosis of these polio survivors were compared with the Canadian population rates (which are 4.8% for men and 7.9% for post-menopausal women), the rate was higher among survivors. How representative are these findings of the post-polio population? The authors point out that the patients who had been sent for bone density testing were weaker than those who had not been referred so were probably somewhat more likely to have osteoporosis. However, about 19% of survivors who had bone density scans, had had them performed only on their stronger hip. So if they only had osteoporosis in their weaker hip this would have not have been apparent in their bone scans and they would have been assessed as not having osteoporosis. The authors recommend that when having bone density tests *all postpolio patients be evaluated for osteoporosis at both hips (or less preferably at the hip of the weaker lower extremity) and at the lumbar spine.*

Exotic crutches

LemonAid Crutches of Colorado is the place to visit at www.lemonaidcrutches.com if you want to make your crutches a fashion item. The company was founded by Laurie Johnson after a plane crash which killed her husband and son and left her using crutches. To cheer herself up she had her crutches professionally painted and used gorgeous designer fabrics to make padded covers for the tops and hand grips. As Laurie says, *No one wants to be on crutches. They hurt your hands, they hurt your arms and they certainly hurt your sense of style. Many have tried to tackle the challenge of adding comfort to an uncomfortable item, but duct tape and washcloths look... well... tacky. That's why we created designer crutchware that's not only comfortable, but fun and fabulous looking.* The hundreds of possible combinations of colour and fabrics available are organised around six themes, safari adventure (various animal fur fabrics), Asian inspiration (exotic silks), Arctic warmth, American energy, British tradition and island inspiration. You can purchase short or longer matching bags that attach to the hand grip of the crutch and several sets of covers to mix and match with your wardrobe. Purchases can be made online. However Canadian

(forearm) crutches are not available at LemonAid. Try www.fetterman-crutches.com for these and some interesting crutch design innovations. LemonAid.com is worth a visit even if you don't need or plan to buy and it may give you ideas for smartening up your appliances.

Disability in popular songs

A unique listing of songs performed or written by or about people with disabilities has been developed by Anthony Tusler on his website www.aboutdisability.com. In the *Tuscaloosa News* (7/10/07) Susan Swartz wrote about some of his collection. *Remember the song 'Save the last dance for m', and how the man tells the woman to go ahead and dance as long as they leave together at the end of the night?...It's a romantic snapshot. She dances. He watches. And when the music's over, they put their arms around each other and go home....The songwriter was Doc Pomus, a blues singer who had polio and used crutches and a wheelchair. His wife was a Broadway actress who liked going out on the town. Tusler, who's been in a wheelchair since he was injured as a kid, considers the song real poetry. 'He [Pomus] talks about something universal that men don't usually voice. He discloses that he feels vulnerable. But the part that really gets me is how he says with complete certainty that he knows she'll go home with him. I love his confidence'*. Mention is also made of DuBose Heyward who had polio as a child and wrote *Porgy*, a novel about a disabled man which George Gershwin used as the basis for the opera *Porgy and Bess*.

Buying petrol in Delaware

Many of us face the hassles of having to drive miles to a service station which provides driveway service (and where petrol costs higher than at most service stations) or waiting until we have a friend with us in the car who can fill up. In Delaware it is law that all fuel retailers provide petrol for people with disabilities at the self-service rate. Service stations with only one worker who operates the pumps from a remote location are exempt from providing driveway service. A new law has been approved by the government which requires self-service stations to install at least one calling device that will allow disabled drivers to call for assistance. Some people say disabled drivers should just honk their horn but visits to a number of Delaware service stations showed that no one paid any attention to honks (from an article by J.L.Miller in *The News Journal*, 13/6/07).

Israeli polio survivors block Jerusalem

There has been much recent publicity given by polio support group newsletters to the decision of the Israeli government to compensate polio survivors for the fact that the Israeli government in the early years of the state failed to provide adequate vaccination. Many Israeli polio survivors were also harmed by experimental surgery. The new law, passed in March 2007, provided a lump sum and life time monthly payments depending of survivors' degree of disability. However in July the *Jerusalem Post* (18/7/07) reported that the Finance Ministry intended to cancel the law. On August 5th the *Post* told how *hundreds of polio victims demonstrated on Jerusalem's Rehov Shazar in front of the Central Bus Station Sunday morning, blocking the roads into the city*. Blogger Franne Golan (<http://gimpsopinionsfromthenorth.blogspot.com/>) who took part in the demonstration was irate; *our criminal government is trying to get out of it [payment]. For that alone I think they should be sent to prison, or given polio themselves....Our fearless Prime Minister is so scared of a bunch of cripples in wheelies that he brought in police and anti terror back up to protect himself from us. On second thought maybe he was right. We can be a*

dangerous bunch when we get going.. ...In the end it was decided to make a partial payment to the polio people, but we might well be back to make them hand over the rest....
The lump sum has been dropped.

Polio vaccine team beaten up

On August 9th 2007 the Pakistani paper *Dawn* reported that a team of health workers administering Sabin vaccine to children in the village of Charmang near the Afghan border were attacked. *The assailants manhandled the health workers and damaged vaccine kits. The health workers later said they were kept hostage for more than four hours. After the attack, the administration suspended the vaccination program for an indefinite period.*

Muslim clerics roped in to increase vaccination rate

In Uttar Pradesh, the state of India most affected by polio, *the health authorities have roped in Muslim clerics to administer polio drops to counteract the resistance of parents due to rumours that vaccination is a western conspiracy to make their children sterile. Daily India (5/8/07) quoted a cleric and parents as saying these misconceptions had been reduced and larger numbers were turning up for vaccination.*

Governor with polio has access problem

The new lieutenant-governor of Ontario, David Onley, is a polio survivor who uses leg braces and a scooter. According to *The Star (12/7/07): Under the Ontarian Human Rights Act, people with disabilities have the legal right to access premises with dignity and without impediment. But in order to access his own suite of offices at Queen's Park, David Onley...will have to use a side door and go through the administrative cafeteria. It is a perfect symbol of the issues still facing the 1.5 million disabled Ontarians.*

A house at last for iron lung users

Recently we reported on June Middleton's Guinness World Record as living longer than anyone else in an iron lung. June who is 81 contracted polio in 1949 aged 23 and has lived in hospitals ever since. She has now moved into Australia's first home (house) for people with chronic ventilator dependency in Melbourne which has been funded by the state government. The other residents are Jill who is on a ventilator and Julian who has muscular dystrophy and uses an iron lung. June says *her contribution to the design was asking the architects to provide large wardrobes. 'At last, I've got a large wardrobe'. Jill's greatest pleasure is being able to wash her dishes after a meal. ...She showed off her new room—her cherished mystery novels, the chardonnay in the fridge, and the spot where she'll put the budgie. Julian says his new environment has completely changed his attitude---he has transformed from sullen and withdrawn to exuberant and optimistic...his new home has given him an independence he could never have imagined.* (Story from the *Herald Sun* 2/8/07).

Polio murder case update

Last issue we reported on the murder charge laid against American Dr Charles Mercer for murdering his wife in 1968. The death was blamed on polio despite the disease almost having been eliminated at that time and much evidence suggesting murder. However the judge trying the case has thrown it out of court ruling *that the passage of almost four decades and the loss of files and evidence make it impossible to proceed.* The County Prosecutor plans to challenge the ruling. (*Free Press, Michigan, 6/8/07*)

Pregnancy outcomes after polio

When I was having my first child I asked the doctor if having polio could affect the pregnancy. *Of course not*, he replied but it seems that some of the problems I had are more frequent among mothers who had polio. '*Pregnancy, delivery and perinatal outcomes in female survivors of polio*' has been published in the July issue of the *Journal of the Neurological Sciences*. Dr Gyri Veiby and colleagues examined the 2495 births by Norwegian polio survivors between 1967 and 1998 and compared them to the 1.9 million deliveries to non-polio mothers in the country. All Norwegian births since 1967 have been recorded in detail in the Medical Birth Registry. The researchers found that polio survivors had higher rates of pre-eclampsia, urinary tract infections and vaginal bleeding during pregnancy. Their deliveries were more likely to be complicated by obstruction during the birth process. Caesarean sections (both emergency and elective) were more common among polio mothers. The higher Caesarean rate is thought to be due to *mechanical obstruction during labor. Bony deformities in the pelvis and spine and paralysed muscles responsible for expulsive efforts during the 2nd stage of labor, can lead to operative delivery in polio patients. ..The increased rate also of emergency sections shows that the need for operative intervention was underestimated in these patients.* Deliveries were also more likely to be induced in the polio group. Polio survivors' babies were of lower birthweight and the risk of death of the baby was greater. There were more presentation problems for polio mothers older than 34; mainly a higher proportion of breech deliveries. There was no difference in the length of pregnancy of the two groups of mothers. The authors argue that the research findings are relevant to the considerable number of female polio survivors of childbearing age in developing countries where information on the risks of complications in pregnancy when the mother has had polio is difficult to collect.