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TALKING THERAPY

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is considered an effective 'talking treatment' for depression, but is not always immediately available in the NHS. Because of the poor availability of 'talking therapy' there has been a lot of interest in computer assisted cognitive behavioural therapy – where you sit in front of a screen and work your way through a programme. It sounds attractive – it's cheap, it's quick and it's anonymous – you don't have to bare your soul to an inquisitive clinician. Sadly the BMJ has put the dampers on the idea – it says this approach provides little or nothing in the way of benefits for depression. The conclusion is damning: "Computer assisted cognitive behavioural therapy is likely to be ineffective in the treatment of depression because of low patient adherence and engagement, suggests the largest study of its kind." Moreover: "the routine promotion and commissioning of cCBT be reconsidered" because it is "likely to be an ineffective form of low-intensity treatment for depression and an inefficient use of finite healthcare resources." So ... it's back to the drawing board!

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

You've heard of 'Foot and Mouth Disease.' This is 'Tooth and Heart Disease.' I was glancing through an old copy of the BMJ online and spotted a paper somewhat unappealingly called: Toothbrushing, inflammation, and risk of cardio vascular disease – results from the Scottish Health Survey. What it was saying, in a nutshell, was that, if you don't brush your teeth twice a day, you're more likely to develop heart disease – in other words, people with poor oral hygiene tend to have dodgy tickers.

In the last twenty five years there has been increased interest in links between heart problems and gum disease. While it has been established that inflammation in the body (including mouth and gums) plays an important role in the build-up of clogged arteries, this is the first study to investigate whether the number of times individuals brush their teeth has any bearing on the risk of developing heart disease, according to the researchers.

A certain Professor Watt concludes: "Our results confirmed and further strengthened the suggested association between oral hygiene and the risk of cardiovascular disease – furthermore inflammatory markers were significantly associated with a very simple measure of poor oral health behaviour". He adds that "future experimental studies will be needed to confirm whether the observed association between oral health behaviour and cardio vascular disease is in fact causal or merely a risk marker".

In other words ... is there a cause and effect relationship (inflammation of the gums triggering inflammation in the blood vessels feeding the heart muscle, which in turn predisposes to them getting clogged up) or is it just that those who don't look after their teeth don't look after their hearts either. My guess is that it's a bit of both.

So, if you're stuck for an idea for a Christmas present for your nearest and dearest, get 'em a toothbrush!

DON'T FORGET TO VOTE

Mid Essex desperately needs better funding for healthcare. We get a very poor deal from the NHS compared with surrounding areas. If we get more dosh we promise we won't let the managers spend it all on themselves. Google **NHS Mid Essex petition** or go to <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/110663>

WHERE YOUR MONEY GOES

"Hospital bosses have given themselves huge pay rises for a second year running – and are still using public money to gag departing staff, stopping them from speaking out about blunders." This statement is taken from a report by Paul Bentley and Lucy Osborne for the Daily Mail; they go on to say that "An astonishing 50,000 Health Service employees are on six-figure pay deals, with one hospital boss earning more than £1.2million last year. One NHS boss was listed in an annual report as earning between £315,000 and £320,000 in 2013/14. The Mail subsequently found he earned almost three times that amount. It took months of questions to NHS bodies before the true figure emerged."

The NHS Fat Cats do love their holidays. Sue and I, by way of contrast, only managed a week in Walberswick this year – it's not the cost of holidays that's the problem, it's the cost of employing doctors to look after our patients while we're away that limits us to one week away together a year.

The Fat Cats like to go further afield. In a story by Jake Burman in The Express we read: "A major investigation reveals Health Service fat cats have been blatantly abusing taxpayers' funds – with another NHS boss, Caroline Shaw, allegedly using £2,600 of public money to pay for an Ibiza holiday. She was also paid a staggering £245,000 while being investigated over the claims."

The Express also has a story about a manager a little closer to home. The headline: "NHS boss who resigned after cancer scandal claims £6k for safari trip – and YOU'RE paying." Jake B goes on to say: "AN NHS boss invoiced the British taxpayer for £5,700 after getting a huge bill for cancelling a luxury safari break.

Jake B comments: "Figures released under Freedom of Information laws have exposed health chiefs who have been taking millions of pounds in pay rises in spite of government orders."

I imagine everybody gets irritated when they read of the excesses of the NHS hierarchy. I find it particularly sickening given that I had to donate over £8000 to the NHS at the end of last month to pay the staff and continue to provide a service to my patients. Meanwhile the 'high life' administrators are laughing all the way to the bank.

Dr John