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AGEING POPULATION

The Sun tells us that the “Queen is hiring an assistant to help deal with the soaring demand for her 100th birthday telegrams. Fancy a job with the Queen?” The paper will give you all the info you need to become part of the Royal Household.

'Royal Insight' says: The Queen wants to employ someone to become her assistant anniversaries officer as demand for her royal mail soars. The assistant anniversaries officer will help with birthdays and dates such as diamond wedding anniversaries and will be paid £20,000. Demand for her 100th birthday telegrams are said to be soaring.”

Some people must be doing something right. Indeed many are not just living to be a hundred but are still remarkably active and healthy at that age. I had to interview a doc called Bill Frankland a while back for a programme on allergy. He'd survived using himself as a guinea pig for dangerous medical trials and being a Japanese prisoner for 3 and a half years – but far from, being a broken man he was a bundle of energy and enthusiasm. In his early days, he worked with Fleming at St Mary's – he was the famous penicillin discoverer's registrar and the two men had adjacent offices. It was a strong possibility that, one breezy day, one of the spores he was working on landed on Fleming's agar plate and gave rise to the antibiotic era. It was Dr Bill who persuaded Britain's media to include the pollen count in weather forecasts back in 1961. Michael Hanlon published an interview in The Telegraph in March 2012 when he celebrated his 100th birthday. It began: “Dr Bill Frankland is a very busy man. A brief run through his diary is enough to make one wince with vicarious exhaustion. His is a world of international conferences, speeches and official dinners. As perhaps the most eminent and senior practitioner in the management and treatment of allergy, he is much in demand.”

Some of the increasing longevity we are witnessing is due to better living conditions and some is due to improved healthcare and 'good genes' – but most of it is due to a healthy lifestyle with plenty of exercise. The other side of the coin, unfortunately, is that we are increasingly seeing 'epidemics' such as obesity which are killing off far too many people in their prime – and, sadly, many of them have no idea of the magnitude of the risk they are running.

BIGGER CARS FOR BIGGER DRIVERS

Alan Tovey reports in The Telegraph on "Sheryl Connelly, who works in Ford's 'global consumer trends and futuring' department in Detroit." She is "helping the company to adapt to big consumer changes" and has said "the industry needs to prepare for humans growing in size." She is quoted in the article as follows: ""We need to look at the human profile if the obesity epidemic continues. When you have these physiological changes you can get reduced response times." She points out that even reversing becomes difficult as you may be unable to turn your head fully or look over your shoulder. SC reminds us that "obesity is not a Western issue but a global problem: between 2008 and 2013, obesity in people aged over 15 rose by 92pc in Vietnam, by 57pc in China, which is the world's largest car market, and by 37pc in India."

HEARTBURN

Most days, for three weeks or more, could be a sign of oesophageal or stomach cancer – “tell your doctor”. This headline introduces a new health campaign aimed at picking up cancer of the oesophagus – the tube that takes food and drink down into the stomach - and the stomach itself, at an early and treatable stage. The reason - early detection greatly increases your chance of survival.

The website gives the following advice: “Even if you’re taking medicine and it seems to help, you still need to see your doctor if you have heartburn for most days. Other symptoms of oesophageal or stomach cancer may include:

- Indigestion on and off for 3 weeks or more
- Food feels like it’s sticking in your throat when you swallow
- Losing weight for no obvious reason
- Trapped wind and frequent burping
- Feeling full very quickly when eating
- Feeling bloated after eating
- Nausea or vomiting
- Pain or discomfort in your upper tummy area.”

So what are the stats? As ever, Cancer Research UK has all the answers: oesophageal cancer is the thirteenth most common cancer in the UK – it's the eighth most common cancer in men and the fourteenth in women. In 2011, around 8,300 people were diagnosed with oesophageal cancer in the UK, that’s 23 people every day. Oesophageal cancer is the eighth most common cancer in men in the UK, with around 5,600 new cases diagnosed in 2011 ... and around 2,800 women were diagnosed with oesophageal cancer in 2011 in the UK making it the fourteenth most common cancer in women. It affects older people more frequently - more than 8 in 10 oesophageal cancers occur in people aged 60 or over. Most worrying is the startling increase in incidence - oesophageal cancer rates have risen by 65% in men and 14% in women since the mid-1970s. It is now the sixth most common cause of cancer death - in 2012, around 7,700 people died from oesophageal cancer in the UK. As for our success in tackling the problem ... as usual we are doing badly here. The UK mortality rate is the highest in Europe for both males and females!

As ever, prevention is MUCH better than cure. The new website has details of how to reduce your chances of getting these 'oesophago-gastric cancers' ... including the following:

"•Stop smoking. It’s never too late to quit. No matter what age you stop smoking, it reduces your chances of developing cancer and makes a real difference to your health in general. There’s plenty of support and help available from the NHS. Visit Smokefree or call 0300 123 4044.

- Look after yourself: If you’re overweight, you can lose weight by combining a calorie-controlled diet with regular exercise. Swimming, cycling, dancing – the more you can do, the better. Even walking to your local shops instead of taking the car can make a difference.
- Eat healthily: Try to get your 5 A DAY. So eat more vegetables, fruit, fish and wholegrain foods. Eat less fattening foods like cakes and pastries and fewer processed meats like bacon and ham.

•Cut back on drinking alcohol: Drinking too much alcohol can lead to a number of health problems and is linked with cancer. By drinking less, you'll reduce your health risks."

For more info, see <http://www.nhs.uk/be-clear-on-cancer/oesophagogastric-cancer/home> or Google *Cancer Research UK Oesophageal cancer*.

DON'T DIE OF EMBARRASSMENT

Cancer Research UK has also been involved in a new study. King's College News reports: "Embarrassment and not wanting to waste their doctors' time are more frequently reported by British people than in other countries, according to new research led jointly by King's College London and UCL (University College London). This may be holding British people back from presenting early with symptoms of cancer." The international study, published in the *British Journal of Cancer*, "is the largest of its kind, and suggests that cultural factors such as the British 'stiff upper lip' may help explain some of the differences in cancer survival rates between the UK and other high-income countries. In partnership with Cancer Research UK and Ipsos MORI, the team surveyed 19,079 men and women aged 50 and older in Australia (4,002 individuals), Canada (2,064), Denmark (2,000), Norway (2,009), Sweden (2,039) and the UK (6,965)."

So, are we dying of ignorance? Although many are unaware of the risk factors for cancer and are 'sleepwalking' into disaster, we Brits seem to know as much about the symptoms as anyone else. The news report picks up the story: "The researchers found there was little difference in awareness of cancer symptoms and beliefs about cancer outcomes between the countries. However, the study revealed significant differences in people's barriers to symptomatic presentation. Being worried about wasting the doctor's time was particularly common in the UK (34%) and least common in Sweden (9%). Embarrassment about going to the doctor with a symptom that might be serious was most commonly reported in the UK (15%) and least in Denmark (6%). The study also found that awareness of the risk of cancer being higher in older people varied significantly across countries, being lowest in Canada (13%) and the UK (14%) and highest in Sweden (38%)"

It's sad when we see potentially curable diseases that are picked up too late - so, as I say, "don't die of embarrassment."

CONFIDENTIALITY

It's back in the news. The *Indy* (great value at 30p) reminded us that the so-called 'anonymous' NHS database could still allow patients to be identified, *Private Eye* carried a story about a local council which put a disabled man's care out to tender in a way which made it pretty obvious just who they were talking about, and the Nuffield report (due out next Tuesday) will make interesting reading. Tune in for next week's exciting episode!

Dr John Cormack