



Professor John Croall
Bulletin Editor

Curioser and curioser

In the President's column on the next page, Peter quotes the famous Humpty Dumpty to good effect. As an infection control doctor I've been feeling we are almost in Wonderland ourselves sometimes. Perhaps it is because I've just gone and seen (and really enjoyed) the new Alice in Wonderland movie (in glorious 3D). Here is the sort of thing I mean. Our Trust (and most others) are trying to agree their new MRSA bacteraemia targets with our Strategic Health Authority (SHA). We did quite well last year – four cases in the stipulated time period. A 20% reduction is required of us – and the SHA says that means three. Not so say we! 20% off four is 3.2, and since you can't have a fifth of a patient, this rounds up to 4! Oh no you don't, say they, three it is – you have to always go down you know. But that's 25%! Sorry. How about we split the difference – π cases then? What? $\pi = 3.14$ etc, you know? Nice mathematical number. NO. I guess it is hard cheese if you get to zero. Minus one next?

Levity aside, I know what a tragedy it is for every patient who acquires an MRSA bacteraemia. MRSA doesn't take many prisoners – the mortality rate is very high. We have to prevent this happening to people. Can we eliminate this risk completely and utterly though? I doubt it, I really do.

As you read this the NHS will have entered the first of several years marked by financial austerity. The level of austerity is uncertain. But it is clear that it is going to be *bad*, at least that is what everyone is saying. Many of you in the UK, like me, will have started to talk to your neighbouring Trusts, as a result of the Department of Health's enterprising take on Lord Carter's report, to see if you can save shed loads of money by working closer together. Or something, anything as long as it produces shed loads of savings. Oh yes – and you have to maintain quality at the same time.

We've got to do something – maybe becoming lean and mean is the best bet. But what if you are already as lean as can be? Most of us think we are, but most of us are wrong I think. In any event please read the article by Ian Barnes on page 102. He clearly sets out the challenges we face and puts forward ways to use these as an opportunity to get even better than we already are. And no, we are not perfect, not even nearly.

Another welcome enterprise follows on page 103 – the Pathology Harmony Initiative. No, this is

not a laboratory barbershop quartet but a serious attempt to get agreement on laboratory reference ranges and units. You know the sort of thing: g/dl vs. g/L vs. mmol, etc. Very confusing to our users, at the very least. Shame their remit doesn't cover microbiology yet. We need help too. Should we call a germ *Staphylococcus albus* or coagulase-negative Staph or *Staphylococcus epidermidis*? Group A β -haemolytic *Streptococcus* or *Strep. pyogenes*? Maybe one day.

The main topic of this issue is Training. Twenty pages devoted to pathology trainees. Curricula, research, training schools, attrition rates, it's all here. Not only that – we have published two top-class audits – of post mortems and *C. difficile* on death certificates. Also in this issue you'll find another helping of news from last year's National Pathology Week. I think that should be the end of it but you never know.

The most unusual article is one that Trevor Gray has penned – on the joys of electric cycling. Both Trevor's and my folding bikes are regular visitors to the College – I can cycle from Euston to the College in a very comfortable and unsweaty 15 minutes – way faster than the Tube or a taxi. I highly recommend you read this one – it might just inspire one of you to get on your bike.

Finally, anyone fancy my job? Not the one in Chester – this Editor one. My three years are almost up and new blood is required. Never had much to do with the College? Well, that didn't stop me. OK, I'd been a few years on the North-West Regional Council so I had some idea but I hadn't visited the College since I was handed my MRCPATH certificate back in 1990. It is interesting work and you would be supported by a great editorial team. It's the best job I've had for a long time. Anyway, please think about it.

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