

Spontaneous rupture of an umbilical hernia

A 51-year-old man with decompensated liver cirrhosis and ascites was admitted as an emergency following spontaneous rupture of a previously asymptomatic umbilical hernia. Following initial loss of a large amount of fluid at home, he was having intermittent discharge of fluid from the umbilical hernia at an area of skin breakdown which later became much larger with evisceration of

omentum (*Figure 1*). Following resuscitation he underwent uneventful mesh repair of the hernia with excision of the protruded omentum.

Umbilical hernia occurs in about 20% of patients with cirrhosis and ascites. However, spontaneous rupture of the her-

Figure 1. Ruptured umbilical hernia with protrusion of omentum.



nia is rare and carries a high mortality. Complications include rapid loss of a large quantity of ascitic fluid that is often poorly tolerated and may prove fatal, evisceration, infection, renal failure and hepatic failure. The mortality is as high as 50% for those managed conservatively, compared with a mortality of 10–20% in those treated surgically (Granese et al, 2002). Whenever possible surgery may be delayed to optimize the condition of the patient. However, in the presence of strangulation or evisceration (*Figure 1*) emergency surgery is indicated (Lemmer et al, 1983). **BJHM**

Granese J, Valaulikar G, Khan M, Hardy H III (2002) Ruptured umbilical hernia in a case of alcoholic cirrhosis with massive ascites. *Are Surg* **68**(8): 733–4

Lemmer JH, Strodel WE, Knol JA, Eckhauser FE (1983) Management of spontaneous umbilical hernia disruption in the cirrhotic patient. *Ann Surg* **198**(1): 30–4

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IN THE PUBLIC'S VIEW

Dawkins rides again

I was quite taken by Elisis Livingstone. The deep 'knowing' told her that modern man had gone astray because of now having only two of the original 12 strands of DNA that we had when we were in Atlantis. She closed her eyes and wiggled her hands a bit. Thus Professor Richard Dawkins, in the second of his 'Enemies of Reason' (Channel 4, 20 August), had the last triangle of DNA inserted into his genome. Come back in 6 months, she told Dawkins, and tell me how you've got on.

The thing is, Elisis Livingstone believes this. In the course of 'The irrational health service', as the programme was sub-titled, Richard Dawkins had the soles of his feet slapped, slept on a bed while crystal energy was beamed at him, had some strange black instrument clicked on the back of his neck to unblock an energy channel, and was told in no uncertain terms that he could scarcely expect to have angels on his shoulders if he hadn't invited any to be there. Angels, incidentally, are – metaphorically – like teas: you can have fruit teas, or herb teas, or breakfast teas – are you following this?

Dawkins' thesis was that, far from being harmless nonsense that many believe makes them feel better, this is part of an implicit attack on scientific medicine, a war on reason. It takes scientific terms – energy, vibration, quantum theory – to dress its unfounded ideas in ironically respectable clothes. As in the first programme (*In the Public's view...*, vol 68(9), 2007, p. 496), Dawkins kept stressing the importance of evidence over anecdote, but also as in the first programme we just didn't get enough of the evidence.

Homeopathy took up the whole third quarter of the programme. The redoubtable Dr Peter Fisher ('I admit homeopathy has a plausibility problem'), director of the Royal Homeopathic Hospital (refurbished with lovely wooden floors laid at taxpayers' expense), not only parried Dawkins but to many probably got the best of it. Yes, I know that the *Lancet's* meta-analysis of meta-analyses showed that the benefits of homeopathy are just less than the square root of –1, but that was lost in the background. Professor Dawkins sat in on three of Dr Fisher's consultations: who would not

want an hour with the doctor? He was kind and listened: if only the NHS could provide what he provides. He prescribed one of his patients a homeopathic preparation of salt.

No one who takes homeopathic medicines will have had even the smallest seed of doubt sewn. But I loved Dawkins' turn of phrase. Accepting that their remedies do not contain even one molecule of what is on the label, homeopaths 'Paddle further up the creek of pseudo-science' in invoking that water has memory.

Here there was a gaping hole in the programme. Before this idea was introduced, Fisher said 'We still don't understand the structure of water', and that was left as an unsupported statement. Don't we? The programme should have ditched the delightfully batty Elisis Livingstone, got its teeth into the structure of water, and tried to show Peter Fisher that he would be better using his considerable medical talents in the cause of rational medicine. **BJHM**

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