

subdural haematoma. In these cases, the bilateral haematomas cause bilateral effacement of the cerebral sulci and produce no midline shift because of equivalent compression of the brain parenchyma on both sides; this, along with the isodensity of the lesion, can lead to misdiagnosis (Moseley, 1994).

If an isodense bilateral chronic subdural haematoma is suspected, and CT is not conclusive, then magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is the method of choice for diagnosis. MRI identifies subdural haematomas and characterizes them as chronic in both T1 and T2 weighted images, where they appear hyperintense in relation to the brain and CSF. MRI provides accurate estimation of the size of the haematoma and guides the neurosurgeon in the urgency of surgical intervention and on where to position the burr holes to achieve the least traumatic and most effective evacuation (Williams and Hogg, 2000).

Before the introduction of MRI, the only method to corroborate the diagnosis was the electroencephalogram (EEG). EEG shows slow waves, which are monomorphous at the thickest part of the haematoma and polymorphous at its periphery. Another classic but rare EEG finding with significant localization value is the local expansion of the EEG curves at the centre of the haematoma and the recording of slow waves at its periphery, which may reach an isoelectric line. This is not the result of necrosis of the cortex but is caused by the presence of the haematoma between the cortex and the electrodes. The EEG may still be useful in hospitals where an MRI is not available.

CONCLUSION

Bilateral chronic subdural haematomas should always be suspected as a possible cause of mild neurological deficit

or progressive dementia, in older patients especially when there is a history of mild head injury or coagulopathy. If a CT scan is inconclusive, either EEG or a brain MRI is mandatory. **HM**

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IN THE PUBLIC'S VIEW...

Get SARS in perspective

As I write, the UK has been declared a SARS-free zone by the WHO. SARS is an important disease that we need to get serious about: unlike malaria, AIDS and TB it kills people like us. The media have verged on the hysterical, stressing that SARS has no cure but failing to mention that few viral diseases do, including influenza, which it most resembles. Tories trying to gain cheap points in parliament when so far the risk to this country from SARS is negligible was almost, although not quite, as bad as listening to pro Iraqi-war politicians say, 'I told you so'. In Iraq, the fat lady has not yet sung.

There's an odd epidemiological tendency about SARS that I've not yet seen reported in print. It was the journal *Nature* that drew my attention to it. Above one of their news stories was a photograph of a street somewhere in the Far East. Almost everyone in the photograph was wearing a facemask, nothing exceptional about that; but almost everyone in the photograph was also female

and young. And I realized that this is the way it's been in most of the pictures in the press. There are a number of possible inferences. Perhaps young women are more frightened of the disease, or take more care of their health. Or perhaps picture editors like pretty young women.

The same phenomenon will be seen when the latest GCSE and A level results are published in the summer. Accompanying the stories of the scandal of falling standards (if pass marks are better than last year) or of failing schools (if pass marks are worse) will be photographs of almost exclusively pretty girls, hugging one another with delight as with open-mouthed glee they realize their successes. If it wasn't that discrimination against women is still a serious problem in our society, it might be something worth protesting about.

The coincidence of SARS and the Iraqi war is – I'm not sure what word to use. The religious or superstitious may imbue it with purpose, as if some higher authority is reminding humans

that anything we can do, nature (in a different sense from the journal) can do better. The parallel of the First World War and the Spanish influenza pandemic has not been missed. Both recent events have been depressing not just in their occurrence, but in the reactions, which drive home just how unpleasant the human race can be. In Canada, Chinese restaurants have been attacked. The people in Toronto caught SARS in a hospital not in a restaurant. In the US, which prides itself on a democracy it is trying to impose on Iraq, a successful country music band the Dixie Chicks lost almost all their sales for being openly anti-war. Our world, in which actors playing soap stars can be abused sometimes physically for actions their characters have undertaken on the screen, is a fragile place. It doesn't need the anarchy that followed the disappearance of police from the streets of Baghdad to remind us of that. **HM**

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