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<th>Inflammation, aspirin, and the risk of cardiovascular disease</th>
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<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Cahill, Mary R.; Perry, Ivan J.</td>
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Inflammation, Aspirin, and the Risk of Cardiovascular Disease

To the Editor: Ridker and colleagues (April 3 issue) have provided important new information that will be useful in assessing the risk of cardiovascular events and in optimizing prophylaxis. Both Ridker et al. and Maseri, in his editorial, speculate that the antiinflammatory effects of aspirin may be important in reducing the risk of myocardial infarction when the level of C-reactive protein is high.

It seems unlikely that the antiinflammatory effects of aspirin have an important role, since these effects are minuscule and short-lived at the dosage used in the study by Ridker et al. (325 mg every other day). Were these effects of aspirin indeed important, higher doses would be expected to confer a greater cardioprotective effect. I am not aware of any controlled study that has demonstrated a greater effect with higher doses.

An alternative possibility is that an elevated level of C-reactive protein is associated with increased coagulability (local or systemic, or both) and that the cardioprotective effects of aspirin are proportional to the magnitude of this increase in coagulability.

WILLIAM M. MURRAY, M.D.
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To the Editor: The report by Ridker et al. adds further support to the response-to-injury hypothesis proposed 20 years ago by Ross et al. However, the conclusion that the benefits of aspirin arise, at least in part, from its antiinflammatory activity is difficult to accept. A dose of one aspirin tablet every other day can hardly be considered an antiinflammatory regimen of the drug. The short (15-minute) biologic half-life of aspirin adds to the doubt. The salicylate resulting from the degradation of aspirin is a very weak contributor to its antiinflammatory effects.

It still seems probable that the unique properties of both aspirin and platelets — namely, aspirin’s acetylation of the enzyme cyclooxygenase and a platelet’s inability to synthesize the new enzyme — are responsible for all the antithrombotic effects observed.

J. John Bruno, Ph.D.
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Hilton Head Island, SC 29928


To the Editor: Ridker and colleagues report that in their study the effect of aspirin on the risk of cardiovascular disease was largely confined to patients with elevated C-reactive protein levels and that an elevated level of C-reactive protein was associated with arterial but not venous thrombosis. The authors hypothesize that the benefits of aspirin in this subgroup reflect antiinflammatory rather than antiplatelet effects of this agent. We suggest an alternative hypothesis.

Platelets are inflammatory cells. In evolutionary terms, platelets are derived from hemocytes — single circulatory blood cells with the combined functions of participating in the inflammatory response, oxygen carriage, and hemostasis. Activated platelets secrete numerous proinflamm-
matory molecules, including thromboxane A₂, which is blocked by aspirin.

The association of platelet activation with the inflammatory process is well documented in inflammatory bowel disease. Platelet activation may contribute to the microvascular thrombosis and infarction reported in association with this condition.

With regard to the link between interleukin-6 and C-reactive protein, to which the authors refer, it should be noted that interleukin-6 has a stimulatory effect on megakaryocytes and may thus be linked to alterations of platelet function.

For these reasons, we propose that in further work addressing these intriguing observations, researchers should avoid a spurious dichotomy between the thrombotic and inflammatory effects of platelets.

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IVAN J. PERRY, M.D., PH.D.
University College Cork, Ireland


The authors reply:

To the Editor: The study reported by Ridker et al. shows that C-reactive protein, as an acute-phase reactant, predicts the risk of myocardial infarction and stroke. However, this study was mostly concerned with the serum level of C-reactive protein as an inflammatory marker, and there is no mention of its presence in the normal and atherosclerotic arterial wall in humans. We have previously measured the level of C-reactive protein eluted from the human arterial wall with different degrees of atherosclerosis. Fatty streaks and uncomplicated fibrous plaques contained the highest levels of C-reactive protein. Lower levels were found in areas of intimal thickening, and only a few normal areas contained the protein.

The accumulation of C-reactive protein in the atherosclerotic wall suggests a local inflammatory event. It is difficult to establish whether the protein is produced locally or derived from the circulation, but both mechanisms are involved in the accumulation of most of the proteins present in the arterial wall. We found that C-reactive protein was localized around the foam cells of fatty streaks, suggesting its local synthesis. For such a strongly responsive and potent acute-phase reactant as C-reactive protein, the small but constant and clinically significant increase in its plasma levels, as Ridker et al. observed in their study, may suggest its slow release from the arterial wall with atherosclerotic lesions.

It is also important to mention that not only C-reactive protein but also other acute-phase reactants, such as complement proteins C3, C4, and C9, as well as important inflammatory cytokines, such as interleukin-6 and interleukin-8, are accumulated in the atherosclerotic wall. The complement system, which is an important immune effector, is present in the arterial wall in its activated form, and this is an important observation, since C-reactive protein is one of its known potent activators.

Thus, C-reactive protein seems to be directly involved in promoting local inflammation by activating other mediators. Its increased concentration in plasma and clinically predictive role should be correlated and indeed reflect, as shown by Ridker et al., events occurring at the level of the arterial wall, where inflammation is responsible for the progression of the atherosclerotic lesion.

Horea RUS, M.D., PH.D.
Florin I. NICULESCU, M.D., PH.D.
University of Maryland School of Medicine
Baltimore, MD 21201


The possibility that aspirin has different effects in different thrombotic settings, such as those associated with plaque rupture as compared with endothelial erosion, is supported by the observations of Drs. Rus and Niculescu regarding the presence of C-reactive protein within the atherosclerotic arterial wall. Whether this accumula-
and those with acute ischemic syndromes. Titer between patients with chronic ischemic syndromes may be markers of a variable individual propensity for an enhanced acute-phase response. The base-line values may be associated with recurrence of instability during 12 months follow-up. J Am Coll Cardiol 1995;Special Issue:250A-251A. abstract.

To the Editor: Dr. Murray’s timely letter offers me the opportunity to comment further on the progressive reduction of the risk of myocardial infarction with increasing levels of C-reactive protein in patients taking aspirin on alternate days. I agree with Dr. Murray that the available evidence is against the hypothesis that aspirin acts as an anti-inflammatory drug because of its short plasma half-life and because inflammatory cells can resynthesize cyclooxygenase. Unpublished data from our group indicate that both in patients with stable angina and in those with unstable angina, the increase in serum C-reactive protein levels in response to different inflammatory stimuli is proportional to the base-line levels of C-reactive protein. Thus, the base-line values may be markers of a variable individual propensity for an enhanced acute-phase response. The hyperresponsiveness of acute-phase reactants can result in enhanced production and an enhanced effect of prothrombotic inflammatory cytokines, which under some conditions may contribute to the development of unstable angina, myocardial infarction, and stroke. This hypothesis may link the long-term prognostic value of C-reactive protein levels within the normal range (as observed in the Physicians’ Health Study) and the prognostic value of mildly elevated levels in patients with stable ischemic heart disease or unstable angina at the time of hospital discharge with the short-term in-hospital prognostic value of markedly elevated levels of C-reactive protein in patients with unstable angina. Moreover, my colleagues and I failed to observe significant differences in cytomegalovirus and Helicobacter pylori serum antibody titers between patients with chronic ischemic syndromes and those with acute ischemic syndromes. Therefore, the greater effect of aspirin in persons in the higher quartiles of the normal range of C-reactive protein in the Physicians’ Health Study is not easily explainable. Since the confidence limits for the risk reduction in the four groups may overlap, the differences may simply be due to the fact that the reduction in risk was more easily detectable in the higher-risk group than in the lower-risk group. However, this intriguing finding should be confirmed by other studies before there is extensive discussion about its possible interpretation.

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CHARLES H. HENNEKENS, M.D.
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3. van der Wal AC, Becker AE, van der Los CM, Das PK. Site of intimal rupture or erosion of thrombosed coronary atherosclerotic plaques is characterized by an inflammatory process irrespective of the dominant plaque morphology. Circulation 1994;89:36-44.

Hepatitis-Associated Aplastic Anemia

To the Editor: Brown et al. (April 10 issue) summarize the main features of hepatitis-associated aplastic anemia and conclude that the hepatitis in patients with this disorder is not likely to be caused by any of the known hepatitis viruses, including hepatitis G virus (HGV). These findings support recent reports questioning the role of HGV in liver disease. In their discussion, Brown et al. also mention that HGV did not appear to cause aplastic anemia.

The article by Brown et al. addresses two different issues: the role of HGV in causing liver disease and the role of HGV in causing aplastic anemia. We agree that HGV is most likely not associated with any liver disease. However, we would like to caution against premature conclusions regarding the role of HGV in causing aplastic anemia. The authors studied serum samples from only 10 patients with hepatitis-associated aplastic anemia and did not report on the prevalence of HGV in serum samples from patients with aplastic anemia not associated with hepatitis.

We have studied the prevalence of HGV RNA in a well-characterized cohort of 16 patients with hepatitis-associated aplastic anemia, as well as 47 concurrent patients with idiopathic aplastic anemia not related to hepatitis, who were matched for age, year of transplantation, and transfusion status. Our results confirmed that transfusions were the main source of HGV RNA in serum from both patients with hepatitis-associated aplastic anemia and those with idiopathic aplastic anemia (26.1 percent of 23 patients without transfusions and 67.5 percent of 40 with transfusions had positive tests for HGV RNA, P = 0.001). However, there was also an increased prevalence of HGV RNA in serum from patients with aplastic anemia who did not receive transfusions (26.1 percent), whether or not the anemia was associated with hepatitis (2 of 4 patients with hepatitis-associated aplastic anemia and 4 of 19 with idiopathic aplastic anemia had HGV RNA), as compared with the prevalence (1.7 percent) in serum from normal blood donors. These results suggest a possible role of HGV in the development of aplastic anemia in some patients. The
findings also underscore the need for prospective studies of patients who have not received transfusions, in order to investigate the possible etiologic role of HGV in aplastic anemia.

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The authors reply:

To the Editor: A possible relation between hepatitis GB virus C (GBV-C), also known as HGV, and aplastic anemia was first suggested by the reports of viremia in a few patients with bone marrow failure who had apparently not received transfusions at the time.1,2 Kiem et al. report viremia in two additional patients with hepatitis-associated aplastic anemia and four with idiopathic aplastic anemia. Although the specific viral cause of post-hepatitis aplastic anemia was not a major subject of our article, we have performed more extensive investigations of the relation of GBV-C to aplastic anemia.

GBV-C viral sequences were present in blood samples from 26 percent of 57 patients with aplastic anemia, as compared with 23 percent of 52 controls who had received multiple transfusions.3 Similar results have been reported by Moriyama et al.4 for patients with aplastic anemia and by other groups for patients who have received multiple blood transfusions because of other diseases. We would be interested to know whether Kiem et al. have determined the rate of hepatitis G viremia in controls with multiple transfusions. Gene-amplification techniques must be carefully controlled because of the susceptibility to contamination. Furthermore, in our experience some of the primers and probes used to detect HGV also have positive results in specimens containing *Escherichia coli* DNA sequences.

Neither we nor Moriyama et al. found GBV-C in patients with aplastic anemia who had not received transfusions. However, GBV-C is not transmitted only as a result of blood transfusion. The virus is highly prevalent in some normal populations: we found that almost 6 percent of normal Vietnamese persons had viral sequences in plasma,5 and a similar proportion of normal American children may also have viremia (unpublished data).

Efforts to establish a relation between GBV-C and any disease have been frustrating. A member of the expanding Flaviridae family has been proposed as a candidate for a viral cause of aplastic anemia.6 However, GBV-C does not appear to be the agent responsible for either the common form of fulminant hepatitis of childhood or seronegative acute “viral” hepatitis. In our opinion, these syndromes and hepatitis-associated aplastic anemia probably share a single infectious cause. Hepatititis viruses commonly “travel” together, and GBV-C viremia may reflect exposure to another, as yet undiscovered pathogenic hepatitis virus.

Caution is indicated in the interpretation of laboratory results until we have a better understanding of GBV-C infection in humans and especially of the importance of viremia in apparently well adults and children.

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High-Dose Pulsed Dexamethasone for Immune Thrombocytopenia

To the Editor: An important and unresolved problem is the treatment of patients with idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura in whom severe thrombocytopenia persists despite splenectomy. In the June 2, 1994, issue, Andersen reported excellent results in 10 patients with refractory idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura (5 men and 5 women) who were treated with high-dose dexamethasone.1 In all the patients who completed six cycles of dexamethasone therapy (40 mg daily for 4 consecutive days every 28 days), platelet counts not only increased but remained above 100×10^9 per liter for at least 6 months after the last cycle of treatment.

We treated 10 consecutive patients with refractory idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura (Table 1, next page). All 10 patients had undergone splenectomy and had had relapses after different treatments. The mean (±SD) age of our patients was similar to the mean age of the patients described by Andersen (36±13 and 41±12 years, respectively; P>0.05), and the mean duration of disease was also similar (43±14 months and 46±22 months, respectively; P>0.05).2 All 10 patients underwent six cycles of the high-dose dexamethasone protocol. The patients were followed for 10 to 22 months after the completion of the trial. As Table 1 shows, none of our patients had a significant increase in the platelet count.

Caulier et al. used a similar protocol,2 and none of their patients had a stable increase in the platelet count to a level
higher than 100×10^9 per liter. We do not think that high-dose dexamethasone is effective in the treatment of refractory idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura. Controlled multicenter trials may help identify new therapeutic options for this disease.

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Semra Dundar, M.D.
Hacettepe University Medical School
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Dr. Andersen replies:

To the Editor: More than four years after the completion of treatment, 7 of 10 consecutive outpatients with resistant idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura who were treated with pulsed high-dose dexamethasone remain in complete clinical remission; 2 are in partial remission. One patient has had a hematologic relapse but remains asymptomatic. Table 1 (facing page) summarizes these results, as well as those for 25 additional patients with new-onset, resistant, or lupus-associated idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura treated at Wayne State University.

Although optimal dosing schedules have not been established, it appears likely that a division of the daily dose, shortened treatment cycles, and the absence of a meaning-

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*Pred denotes prednisone, splen splenectomy, ver vincristine, azathioprine, dan danazol, cyc cyclophosphamide, and IVIG intravenous immune globulin. For patients receiving associated therapy, the drugs were tapered and discontinued after the first cycle of pulsed high-dose dexamethasone.
†There was an initial response followed by a relapse.
‡There was no response.
To the Editor: I was disappointed by “A Common Clinical Conundrum” (April 3 issue). This Clinical Problem-Solving article discussed a procedure — extracranial carotid-artery stenting — that is experimental, has not been validated by published multicenter trials, and is not widely available in community hospitals. In their discussion of success rates, complications, and long-term patency, the authors do not cite any article in a peer-reviewed journal to support their claims, only sketchy abstracts presented at a scientific meeting. They cite no study to prove cost effectiveness, referring only to their own unpublished “preliminary” work. The inclusion of carotid stenting in the Clinical Problem-Solving article has given the technique an imprimatur that it does not yet deserve.

ROBERT L. MITTL, JR., M.D.
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Stenting for Carotid Stenosis?

To the Editor: I was disappointed by “A Common Clinical Conundrum” (April 3 issue). This Clinical Problem-Solving article discussed a procedure — extracranial carotid-artery stenting — that is experimental, has not been validated by published multicenter trials, and is not widely available in community hospitals. In their discussion of success rates, complications, and long-term patency, the authors do not cite any article in a peer-reviewed journal to support their claims, only sketchy abstracts presented at a scientific meeting. They cite no study to prove cost effectiveness, referring only to their own unpublished “preliminary” work. The inclusion of carotid stenting in the Clinical Problem-Solving article has given the technique an imprimatur that it does not yet deserve.

ROBERT L. MITTL, JR., M.D.
Charlotte Radiology
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To the Editor: In “A Common Clinical Conundrum” Gray and associates describe a patient with ischemic heart disease and asymptomatic carotid stenosis who underwent staged carotid-artery stenting and coronary bypass. We assert that the data they cite on morbidity after carotid stenting and endarterectomy are not representative. The data were obtained from a study by Iyer and colleagues, published as an abstract, in which the risk of stroke associated with carotid stenting was given as 3.5 percent. Other articles by the same group have reported stroke rates between 6 percent and 8 percent. At follow-up, which was limited to six months, 6 percent of patients required reintervention (endarterectomy or balloon angioplasty) for stent deformation or restenosis.

The widely published estimates of the risk of neurologic events after carotid endarterectomy from the Asymptomatic Carotid Atherosclerosis Study and the North American Symptomatic Carotid Endarterectomy Trial (NASCET) are 2.4 percent for asymptomatic patients and 5.5 percent for patients with symptoms (transient in two thirds of the latter).

Furthermore, the arteriogram presented as proof of technical success after carotid stent placement demonstrated near-occlusion of the external carotid artery by the stent. This result would be unacceptable after endarterectomy because of the extensive cerebral collaterals dependent on this vessel should restenosis develop in the internal carotid artery.

In summary, the authors have described the use of carotid stenting in a high-risk patient with coronary artery...
The authors reply:

To the Editor: We strongly agree with Dr. Mittl — at this time, carotid stenting should be performed only under a strict investigational protocol with appropriate multidisciplinary support and assessment. Its experimental nature should be clearly explained to potential patients, as should clinical advantage has ever been proved for the administration of 600 mg every six hours as opposed to every eight hours. A dosing regimen involving six-hour intervals is more toxic, more expensive, and certainly much more difficult to give on an outpatient basis. Ciprofloxacin, at doses of 750 mg every 8 to 12 hours, should also be considered as an acceptable therapy for serratia or pseudomonas.

AARON E. GLATT, M.D.
Catholic Medical Center of Brooklyn and Queens
Jamaica, NY 11432

To the Editor: Several comments are in order for the U.S. audience of the excellent review of osteomyelitis by Lew and Waldvogel (April 3 issue), especially regarding Table 2. Many infectious-disease specialists prescribe both penicillin and nafcillin every four hours, rather than every six hours as suggested in the article. These beta-lactams have a short half-life, and consideration should certainly be given to using the higher dose (i.e., a shorter interval between doses). Clindamycin can be given effectively every eight hours because of its prolonged half-life. No clinical advantage has ever been proved for the administration of 600 mg every six hours as opposed to every eight hours. A dosing regimen involving six-hour intervals is more toxic, more expensive, and certainly much more difficult to give on an outpatient basis. Ciprofloxacin, at doses of 750 mg every 8 to 12 hours, should also be considered as an acceptable therapy for serratia or pseudomonas.

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AARON E. GLATT, M.D.
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Jamaica, NY 11432

The authors reply:

To the Editor: We strongly agree with Dr. Mittl — at this time, carotid stenting should be performed only under a strict investigational protocol with appropriate multidisciplinary support and assessment. Its experimental nature should be clearly explained to potential patients, as should alternatives such as medical or surgical management. We disagree, however, that there are no peer-reviewed data supporting carotid stenting. At least one published article, by Yadav et al., summarizes the experience with the procedure.

The representation by Estes et al. of the stroke rates in the Yadav article, which is the largest published series of its type, may be misleading. Of 126 stents implanted, there were seven strokes related to the procedure. One was a major stroke, and six were minor. A minor stroke was defined as modest deficits that resolved within a week. Because all these patients met NASCET exclusion criteria, they would not have been included in NASCET. Similar stroke rates were observed in NASCET, which involved a more highly selected patient population than that in the stent study.2 In addition, complications of surgery in NASCET, including cranial-nerve palsy (7.6 percent), wound hematoma (5.5 percent), and infection (3.4 percent), were not seen after carotid stenting. Although the rates of restenosis after carotid surgery range from 5 to 19 percent,3 only three patients received treatment for asymptomatic restenosis after carotid stenting in the study by Yadav et al.1

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to treating severe infections in the outpatient setting, other oral agents such as clindamycin, trimethoprim–sulfamethoxazole, metronidazole, doxycycline, and minocycline also offer excellent bioavailability, favorable dosing schedules, good tissue penetration, long-term tolerability, and low cost.

KEVIN W. SHEA, M.D.
Carolinas Hospital System
Florence, SC 29501


The authors reply:

To the Editor: Dr. Glatt makes some valuable comments on treatment recommendations. Table 2 of our article was not exhaustive, and obviously other antibiotics may be prescribed as he suggests. Parenteral penicillins may indeed be prescribed every four to six hours, although in some cases such as the antipseudomonas penicillins the interval between doses can be extended successfully to eight hours. Clindamycin may be prescribed every six to eight hours (which is more convenient for oral administration) as indicated by the severity of symptoms and infecting microorganisms. In our opinion the glycopeptides are often the only available therapeutic agents for methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus. The other alternatives proposed (trimethoprim–sulfamethoxazole and minocycline) may be used for minor infections with methicillin-resistant S. aureus. Unfortunately, a large proportion of methicillin-resistant S. aureus are resistant to quinolones.

Dr. Shea raises the issue of the role of oral antibiotics in the treatment of osteomyelitis. Although oral treatment of acute osteomyelitis in children has been an accepted approach for many years, the approach to the treatment of acute or chronic osteomyelitis in adults has traditionally been intravenous. In our opinion, for beta-lactam antibiotics intravenous therapy remains the standard for osteomyelitis in adults. Among other agents, clindamycin may be a reasonable alternative for sequential intravenous–oral therapy because of its excellent bone penetration and good bioavailability.

Several good-quality comparative trials have shown the equivalence of oral quinolones and parenteral therapy. We have performed a cumulative analysis of published comparative trials of quinolones to treat osteomyelitis.2 With oral ciprofloxacin, success rates of 92 percent for Enterobacteriaceae (even higher if serratia are excluded), 72 percent for Pseudomonas aeruginosa, and 75 percent for S. aureus were found.2 On treatment with quinolones osteomyelitis due to P. aeruginosa or S. aureus was associated with a fourfold increase in the failure rate, as compared with the failure rate in osteomyelitis due to other pathogens.2 Thus, in the case of osteomyelitis due to Enterobacteriaceae the success rate is so good that no further trials appear to be necessary. This is not the case for S. aureus and P. aeruginosa.

Figure 2B of our article was printed upside down. Therefore, the T1-weighted image appears on the right and the image after the intravenous injection of gadolinium on the left.

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FRANCIS WALDVOGEL, M.D.
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Cellulitis Due to Botfly Larvae

To the Editor: I report a case of cellulitis complicated by what turned out to be botfly larvae.

A 36-year-old woman presented with erythema, swelling, and pain in both shins. The lesions had developed two weeks after she returned from Peru. Cellulitis was diagnosed, and cephalexin was prescribed. The cellulitis improved somewhat, but two weeks after the initial presentation new lesions developed. On examination, the patient had seven tender, erythematous, indurated subcutaneous lesions 2 to 3 cm in diameter, each with a central punctum. A course of dicloxacillin was started. The same night, the patient saw a larva crawl out of a lesion (Fig. 1). She called for advice and was told to apply petroleum jelly to force the other larvae out for air. She tried this briefly, but became impatient and eventually squeezed out the larvae manually. She obtained a total of seven larvae in this man-

Figure 1. Botfly Larva from the Patient (×75).
ner, which were identified as *Dermatobia hominis*, commonly called the human botfly.

*D. hominis* has a fascinating life cycle. It is found widely in humid areas of Mexico, Central America, and South America. Its larvae can survive only in vertebrate tissue; infestation with them is known as myiasis. The adult female botfly deposits eggs on the abdomen of a bloodsucking fly or mosquito, which in turn deposits the eggs on an animal host. The growth of each larva can provoke severe ulceration and secondary infection. Once mature, the larvae erupt through the host’s skin and fall to the ground, where they develop into pupae and subsequently into adult flies.

Myiasis has been reported previously, but this case was remarkable in two respects. The first was that multiple larvae were present. Previous reported cases have involved infestations of at most a few larvae each. The presence of seven larvae in this patient should alert practitioners to look for multiple sites of infestation.

The second interesting aspect was the mode of treatment. Standard recommendations are to apply petroleum jelly or raw meat to draw the larvae out, or to extract them with mosquito forceps. Nowhere does the literature recommend simply squeezing them out. In fact, one may wonder whether such an approach might worsen the problem by crushing the larvae. However, in this patient the procedure was expedient and effective for all seven lesions, and she recovered without sequelae.

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