New on the bookshelf: Recent releases by DMS faculty authors

Heading Home with your Newborn: From Birth to Reality. By Laura A. Jana, M.D.; and Jennifer Shu, M.D., instructor in pediatrics at DMS; American Academy of Pediatrics; 2005. This handbook is intended to help parents cope with the first few months of their baby's life, from feeding, diapering, and bathing to using car seats and traveling on planes. Combining medical information with practical advice (the authors are parents, too), its amusingly titled chapters include "Poop Happens," "Going with the Flow," and "Fever: Trial by Fire."

Dyspnea: Mechanisms, Measurement, and Management. Edited by Donald A. Mahler, M.D., professor of medicine at DMS; and Denis E. O'Donnell, M.B.; Taylor & Francis; 2005 (second edition). This book, on relief of breathlessness in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, covers the causes of dyspnea, dyspnea in asthma, the use of bronchodilators and inhaled corticosteroids, self-management strategies, and instruments available to measure the intensity of dyspnea.

Dartmouth Medicine magazine recently consulted a DHMC also moderated a live, online discussion between its readers and Wennberg—whose research was also cited in a letter to the editor and an article in the Wall Street Journal.

The New York Daily News cited a DMS neuroscientist, noting that "people with mild cognitive impairment (MCI) have trouble remembering new information. More perplexing are people who don't have MCI but are suffering from more than just 'senior moments.' Dr. Andrew Saykin calls them 'cognitive complainers.' . . . 'Early on we thought the people in this cognitive complaint group might just represent the 'worried well' who are somewhat hyper-aware and afraid of developing Alzheimer's disease or another dementia,' said Saykin, director of the brain-imaging lab at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center. [But] people actually appear to be very sensitive to changes that are occurring in the brain . . . early on."

"Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in New Hampshire decided to pioneer a radically new approach. Full disclosure, detailed results, good and bad," reported ABC’s World News Tonight in a story about hospitals that voluntarily disclose performance data. "The trust that you develop with your patient is the most important thing over the long term," Paul Gardent, DHMC executive vice president told ABC’s John McKenzie. "This full disclosure even includes the cost estimates of various procedures and results of patient satisfaction surveys," McKenzie said. "It does highlight where we need to improve," added Gardent.

“Fifteen years have passed since the Americans with Disabilities Act was enacted to protect workers who have a mental or physical impairment,” began an article in a suburban New York paper. However, "workers with epilepsy face big hurdles when it comes to unemployment,” says Dr. Gregory Holmes, chief of neurology at Dartmouth. Only about 25% of adults with epilepsy have full-time employment . . . . a statistic that is out of line even after accounting for their lower college-graduation rates,” Holmes told the Journal News, which serves New York's Westchester, Rockland, and Putnam counties. "Patients will tell you that's often due to the epilepsy itself,” Holmes added.

Shape magazine recently consulted a DHMC physician for advice on how to avoid motion sickness. “Although it’s often tough to predict who will be affected, if you know you're prone to motion sickness, take medication ahead of time, advises Jay Buckey, M.D., associate professor of medicine at Dartmouth Medical School.” What the article failed to mention was that Buckey, in addition to being a physician, is a former astronaut. On the 1998 NASA Neurolab mission, he endured extreme motion—speeds upwards of 17,500 miles per hour.

“Tom Wolfe was so taken with Michael Gazzaniga’s The Social Brain that not only did he send Gazzaniga a note calling it the best book on the brain ever written, he had [a professor in one of his novels] recommend it in class.” So began a New York Times review of a new book by Dartmouth’s best-known neuroscientist. The book also inspired an editorial in the Times of London, which called Gazzaniga “a fascinating character—a rare, secu-
lar voice among a choir of Christians who sit on the President’s Council on Bioethics.”

To explain two recent studies on micro-RNA—a molecule that helps regulate gene expression and protein production—the New York Times turned to microRNA’s “discoverer, Victor Ambros of Dartmouth. With his colleagues Rosalind Lee and Rhonda Feinbaum, he found a gene called lin-4. When the gene was activated, its messenger RNA folded itself up into a little hairpin twist, and that was its product”—a microRNA molecule.

“Peter Jennings’s death from lung cancer,” said the Dallas Morning News, “has left many of the nation’s 48 million former smokers asking apparently simple questions: Should they be screened? Why don’t doctors perform routine checks for lung cancer?” The answer: “We don’t know if it works,” said Dr. William Black of Dartmouth. And if it doesn’t work, it could generate a lot of unnecessary anxiety, medical treatment and cost.” Black, who is cochair of the multicenter National Lung Screening Trial, was featured in the cover story in Dartmouth Medicine’s Summer 2005 issue.

Another subject of that cover story turned up in the New York Times, explaining a medical analogy regarding the Discovery launch. “The more NASA looks for damage, engineers and other experts say, the more it will find,” wrote the Times, likening NASA officials to doctors who have increasingly powerful diagnostic tools at their fingertips. “Dr. H. Gilbert Welch, a professor of medicine at Dartmouth and an expert on medical diagnosis, agreed. ‘A lot of what we’re calling disease now never becomes clinically apparent during the life of the patient,’ he said. ‘Everything you find is less threatening, but you can never say anything is a zero threat.’”

The article quoted the author of a DMS study that came to the same conclusion 10 years ago. “Researcher Lisa Schwartz, M.D., says cancer awareness campaigns often scare people with numbers that highlight the magnitude of cancer risk but provide little context.” Drawing on Schwartz’s research, Fox explained that “a 40-year-old woman who has never smoked, for example, has a 0.2% chance of dying from breast cancer before she is 50.”

“Aspirin does it all,” said the New York Daily News of the tried-and-true painkiller. “Aspirin’s role as an anti-inflammatory agent also appears to interfere with the growth of intestinal cancer cells. In 2002, a study [by Dr. John Baron] at Dartmouth Medical School was the first to show a link between taking aspirin and reducing the number of polyps that lead to cancer. The study looked at 1,121 people who had colon polyps removed. . . . Three years later, the researchers found that only 38% of those getting baby aspirin had new polyps, compared with 47% of people getting placebos.”

“Even after adjusting for age, health, and income differences among states, New Hampshire receives one of the lowest Medicare reimbursement rates in the country,” wrote the Boston Globe. “New Hampshire gets an average of $5,400 per patient, while Massachusetts gets nearly $7,500. . . . Despite the smaller payments, New Hampshire patients are among the most likely to recover from serious illnesses and surgeries.” To explain the apparent contradiction, the Globe quoted “Megan McAndrew, editor of the Dartmouth Atlas, a compilation of medical statistics. ‘You don’t have the duplication of services like you do in Boston. . . . More health care doesn’t mean better health,’ she said.”

Vermont Public Radio reported on a study of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that was “designed to compare the effectiveness of two very different therapies” in women veterans, the reporter explained. “Dartmouth researcher Dr. Paula Schnurr is one of the study’s principal investigators. . . . Schnurr says because the core symptoms of PTSD are the same for women and men, male combat veterans and civilians will benefit from the research.” (See the Summer 2005 issue for more on this study.)