

IN THIS ISSUE

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TAKING STOCK: FOUR YEARS OF THE NEW EDITORIAL TEAM

In this issue the eclecticism of public health is most apparent, and our new sections begin to demonstrate the tapestry of the discipline. From scandals in medical practice, with organ retention at Alder Hey Children's Hospital in

Liverpool, to the public health implications of the terrorist attack on the World Trade-Center in New York, this issue also pays tribute to a collaboration between public health and the arts...and there is also space for significant contributions on a range of epidemiological research and methods that take forward our knowledge-base in practical ways. We hope that by now the philosophy that we set out four years ago when we took over as editors has been translated into a meaningful new feel to this journal as one that strives for global relevance, scientific excellence and a practical orientation, speaking not only to a multi-disciplinary practitioner body, but also to the public at large. We will continue to welcome suggestions and ideas and novel contributions that help bring public health to life.

THE JECH GALLERY.....

A controlled clinical trial in 1809?



In his 1814 Edinburgh MD thesis (see figure), Alexander Hamilton described an experiment that took place during the Peninsular War to assess the effects of bloodletting. Hamilton and two other army surgeons carried out the experiment, which involved 366 sick soldiers in 1809 in the hospital at Elvas, Portugal.

"It had been so arranged, that this number was admitted, alternately, in such a manner that each of us had one third of the whole. The sick were indiscriminately received, and were attended as nearly as possible with the same care and accommodated with the same comforts. One third of the whole were soldiers of the 61st Regiment, the remainder of my own (the 42nd) Regiment. Neither Mr Anderson nor I ever once employed the lancet. He lost two, I four cases; whilst out of the other third [treated with bloodletting by the third surgeon] *thirty five patients died.*"

No corroborative evidence has yet emerged that the trial actually happened, but it is still noteworthy that Hamilton judged that his description of alternation and standard conditions would impress his examiners.¹

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¹ **Milne I, Chalmers I.** Tackling bias in assessing the effects of healthcare interventions: early contributions from James Lind, Alexander Lessassier Hamilton and T Graham Balfour. *Proc R Coll Phys Edinb* (in press).

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