It is a matter of some concern to us that you felt obliged to print a notice of duplicate publication for Professor Corris. While we all deplore dual publication of original scientific data, the purpose of review articles is to provide a form of CME for practising physicians. It is therefore inevitable that, when an authority in a field is asked to give their current view on a subject, there will be considerable overlap with his/her previous thoughts on the subject. This does not make the article uninteresting to read, nor—as we are sure the Editors are aware—does it stop such articles being frequently referenced.

It is our belief that it is generally understood within the community that review articles by a given author are likely to contain significant overlap with previously published reviews by the same author and that, in this situation, it is rather “missing the point” to call this a duplicate publication.

To illustrate the point we enclose a list of review articles which all contain overlapping material concerning the assessment of respiratory muscle strength. With the exception of the article in Thorax (for which the invitation to write came following a prompt from us), the remaining articles were all written as a result of unsolicited requests by the editorial team of the journal concerned. Like Professor Corris’s articles, they serve a useful function because these journals reach widely differing audiences and in each case the text of the article has been aligned to fit the interests of the readership of the journal concerned.

Our belief is that reviews of this sort do serve a useful role in postgraduate medical education and, because writing them is not recognised by the University Research Assessment Exercise, it is becoming increasingly hard to find experts in their fields who are prepared to do so. Publicly identifying this type of “duplicate publication” serves no useful purpose.

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References
1 Anon. Notice of duplicate publication Thorax 2002;57:5.

Editors’ reply
We published the statement on duplicate publication, as did the other journal concerned, in response to a correspondent who pointed out the similarity between the two articles. When we looked through the article published in Clinical Medicine it was evident that large parts of the article in Thorax were reproduced verbatim.

We appreciate that review articles by the same author in different journals often contain overlapping information, but that was not the point on this occasion. The point was that much of the material was exactly the same, and Professor Corris had not explicitly acknowledged this or the contribution of other authors to it.

We have taken a firm line on duplicate publication and non-disclosure of related publications in the past and, although we accept that some degree of duplicate reporting is acceptable and common in review or opinion articles, having received a formal complaint about the article we did not feel able to dismiss it. This was particularly the case since Professor Corris was until very recently an Associate Editor of Thorax, and we were in danger of being open to accusations of special privilege for people who have been associated with the journal.

J Britton
Executive Editor

Blasi and colleagues found that 43% of patients when stable were positive for *C pneumoniae* by DNA polymerase chain reaction (PCR) using peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMCs). At exacerbation they have only shown data for the 34 (of 61) who consented to the antibiotic trial and all 34 were positive for *C pneumoniae*. In our study a further 33 patients (FEV1% 39.8 (16.4)) with stable COPD during 1 year with simultaneous estimation of plasma fibrinogen and serum interleukin 6 (IL-6); 26% of the patients had IgG titres of $\geq$1 in 16 (fig 1). High *C pneumoniae* IgG titres were not related to FEV1% predicted, exacerbation frequency, plasma fibrinogen, or serum IL-6 levels. In their paper Blasi et al did not report whether there was a relation between MIF titres and exacerbation frequency.

Chlamydia pneumoniae and COPD exacerbation
were IgG antibody positive always negative? It would be helpful if the authors could give the data on the chronic nature of infection in their sputum samples.

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References

Authors’ reply
We are grateful to Seemungal et al for their comments regarding our recently published paper on Chlamydia pneumoniae and chronic bronchitis.1

Seemungal et al prospectively studied 110 patients with COPD for 1 year, evaluating serum microimmunofluorescence IgG titres, plasma fibrinogen, and IL-6 levels. They found no correlation between high IgG titres and FEV1%, % predicted, exacerbation frequency, plasma fibrinogen, and serum IL-6 levels. We also found no correlation between serological results and FEV1%, % predicted or exacerbation frequency. In fact, as in previous reports,2 we found a low degree of correlation between C pneumoniae serology and peripheral blood mononuclear cell (PBMC) PCR. A greater degree of correlation was observed when IgG and IgA titres were combined but, unfortunately, no comparison is possible as Seemungal et al only performed IgG titre determinations. In any case, our findings are not truly comparable with those of Seemungal et al as serology is known to be less specific than PCR for the identification of C pneumoniae infection in disease progression in COPD patients. Further confirmation based on large scale trials is needed.2,3 However, even a slight increase in exacerbation frequency may have a role in disease progression.1,4

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References
Marginal benefits of adding formoterol

Price and colleagues’ conclusion that adding formoterol confers a therapeutic advantage to inhaled steroid in patients with mild to moderate asthma. During the 6 month follow up of this part of the study the efficacy of the secondary outcome of mild asthma exacerbations differed by 2.5 per patient per 6 months while the difference in poorly controlled asthma days was 4.2 days per patient per 6 months. These differences, while statistically significant, are unlikely to be of real clinical relevance. Indeed, during the same period the difference in quality of life was neither significant nor clinically relevant. The main differences which were significant were in bronchodilator sensitive outcomes such as peak flow and reliever use, which are to be expected when patients are taking a 24/7 bronchodilator. These data are little different from those in steroid naïve patients in the OPTIMA trial over 12 months where the addition of formoterol to low dose budesonide improved lung function but not exacerbations, while in the same trial the addition of formoterol conferred only a small but significant reduction in exacerbations in patients previously treated with corticosteroids.

Pointedly, neither of these studies evaluated any inflammatory surrogates. We would therefore suggest that these trials indicate that most patients with mild to moderate asthma can be adequately controlled on low to medium doses of inhaled budesonide alone, and that there is only a marginal advantage conferred by adding formoterol. Moreover, combination inhalers are considerably more expensive than inhaled steroid alone and their routine use is not warranted in primary care.

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Reference


BOOK REVIEW

Respiratory Medicine Specialist Handbook


This is the first in a new series of specialist handbooks that aims to fill the niche between the comprehensive textbook and the pocket handbook. There are the obvious pitfalls of trying to squeeze in too much detail at the expense of accessibility or reducing the subject to little more than a series of disjointed notes. However, this book—for the most part—steers clear of both of these errors and has produced a very readable, yet reasonably detailed, summary of specialist respiratory medicine. The 31 chapters cover a wide variety of topics and the authors’ list is like a “Who’s Who?” of UK respiratory medicine.

It is possible to pick up this book, read a chapter in less than half an hour, and come away with an increased knowledge of the pathophysiology of the condition under study and, perhaps more usefully, the intricacies of practical management which is the focus of the book. It will therefore cater to the specialist registrar undergoing higher specialist training in providing a broad understanding in reasonable detail of most facets of respiratory medicine, but it could also be of use to the experienced physician in reaffirming, reminding, and refreshing of the basics, and perhaps updating knowledge with regard to more recent developments.

The book is attractively presented with short paragraphs of text interspersed with helpful tables and figures. For those who are stimulated to seek more information on any subject, each chapter has a selection of references for further reading. Whilst we all might aspire to read, study and inwardly digest a weighty, comprehensive tome of respiratory medicine, for most of us in busy clinical practice this proves difficult. This reviewer would therefore encourage reading and studying this excellent book as an alternative which is more attainable and possibly of more practical relevance.

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Marginal benefits of adding formoterol

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