



## Highlights from this issue

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*The Triumvirate*

As the festive season approaches, amidst COVID-19 restrictions, we harken back to the glory days of the Christmas single. For decades, the biggest names in popular music (as well as some unlikely contributors) have sought to cheer us up in the middle of winter whilst augmenting their personal bank accounts.

**CHRISTMAS WRAPPING**

The Waitresses, a new wave band from Akron Ohio, released their Christmas single “Christmas Wrapping” in 1982. The band’s lead singer Patty Donahue delivered a cynical, alternative take on the Christmas season. Waitresses often rely on tips to maintain a decent wage and TIP/S is the subject of a paper in this month’s *Thorax* by Heirali and colleagues (see page 1058). The TIP/S in question stand for tobramycin inhalation powder / solution, used in cystic fibrosis as a chronic suppressive therapy for pulmonary infection with *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*. The *Thorax* paper addresses the “off target” effects of TIP/S on the sputum microbiome. The authors analysed 151 sputum samples from 41 patients and conclude that the sputum microbiome remains stable during TIP/S therapy although the baseline microbiome may predict patient response to TIP/S. Sadly, The Waitresses disbanded in 1984 and lung cancer later claimed Patty Donahue as a result of smoking (as featured in the promotional video for the single).

**I WISH IT COULD BE CHRISTMAS EVERYDAY**

No Christmas compilation would be complete without “I Wish It Could Be Christmas Everyday” by Wizzard. However, for many parents, Christmas is associated with considerable psychological distress and the prospect of it happening more than once a year is unthinkable. In

this month’s issue, van Meel *et al* report data from 4231 children in a prospective cohort from the Netherlands (see page 1074). They conclude that maternal, but not paternal, psychological distress in pregnancy is associated with an increased risk of asthma in their children. The Wizzard single features backing vocals from the children of Stockland Green School choir. Maternal stress was likely to be low in the Stockland cohort as no wheezing is audible in the recording.

**LAST CHRISTMAS**

Last Christmas we gave you some papers to read in *Thorax*, the very next day stories began emerging from Wuhan about a nasty pneumonia of possible viral origin. This year to save you from tears we give you two manuscripts on the sero-prevalence of the brand new virus, SARS-CoV-2, which only 12 months ago didn’t even exist. In the first manuscript by Flower and colleagues (see page 1082) describe the assessment of a lateral flow assay (commonly used as pregnancy tests) for SARS-CoV-2 antibodies. They assessed a range of lateral flow tests in comparison with a standard ELISA in PCR positive patients. The lateral flow assays were highly specific but lacked sensitivity. So, okay for seroprevalence studies but probably not the first thing on Santa’s wish-list. In the second manuscript Shields and colleagues (see page 1089) described the prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 in asymptomatic healthcare workers in Birmingham at the height of the surge. Using PCR to estimate the point prevalence and antibodies to assess seroprevalence (not a pregnancy test in sight). Overall 2.4% of staff were positive by PCR at time of sampling but 24% showed evidence of prior infection, which was significantly higher in those with prior symptoms. Highest rates of infection were seen in housekeeping staff and lowest rates in Intensive Care. Being

from a Black, Asian or other Minority Ethnic background also increased the risk of seropositivity. These results are hugely important for understanding nosocomial infection and will help inform occupational health practices, and as the wise guys of Wham might have put it “Once bitten and twice shy, I keep my distance, but you can still catch my eye.”

**MISTLETOE AND WINE**

Mistletoe and Wine, turkey, roast potatoes, and sprouts and red cabbage oh yes and Christmas puddings and mince pies. I often feel like I have eaten myself after the traditional Christmas meal. Indeed, at the biochemical level I probably have. Autophagy, the process by which a cell clears up its cellular waste is a process that is central to a number of inflammatory disease and in this festive edition of *Thorax* (see page 1047) Li and colleagues describe how the MTOR signalling pathway suppressed inflammation by promoting autophagy in models of asthma. Deficiency in MTOR signalling leads to inflammation by promoting IL-25 expression which could be attenuated by blocking IL-25. These studies show a nice link between the dysregulation of autophagy and asthmatic inflammation, but blocking IL-25 probably will not reduce my desire for mince pies and Christmas pud.

**DO THEY KNOW IT’S CHRISTMAS?**

“Do They Know It’s Christmas?” by Band Aid, is perhaps one of the more useful Christmas songs, raising £8 million in 1984, for the relief of famine in Ethiopia.

From Band Aid to first aid, (see page 1130) learn how to perform mediastinal decompression via two incisions one at the sternal notch and one below the xiphoid process.

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