

unusual and florid nature of Matthews' symptoms: "having scarcely in the whole period of his professional practice and experience known any patient more completely and equivocally mad" (Monro, 1809). Haslam's clinical descriptions of his patients are noted for their clarity and keenness of detail, and he would not have failed to record the symptoms of schizophrenia if he encountered them.

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Compulsive water drinkers

SIR: Lee *et al* (*Journal*, April 1989, 154, 556–558) describe the case of a 16-year-old Chinese girl with water intoxication following the ingestion of large quantities of water for traditional medicinal purposes. I was surprised to read the suggestion that the use of water to induce an altered state of consciousness (ASC) had not previously been described. Many of the patients I have seen with excess fluid intake present as 'drunk'; intoxication is defined in most dictionaries as including a feeling of excitement, exhilaration, and inebriation. Perhaps the usual description of the symptoms of water intoxication does not include pleasure as this is not something the patient complains about. The literature does contain references to ASC, though this title is not used. For example, Singh *et al* (1985) describe how Case 1, on becoming unemployed and thus no longer able to afford alcohol, turned to regular excessive water drinking because it "made him feel slightly drunk" (this paper is quoted by Dr Lee *et al*). In a more recent paper on the possible association between water intoxication and alcohol abuse, Ripley *et al* (1989) write that "mild overhydration may be experienced as pleasurable, leading to further polydipsia".

With regard to the case described, the authors make no mention of the girl's tobacco smoking habits, although they acknowledge that the clinical picture suggests a degree of SIADH (syndrome of inappropriate antidiuretic hormone secretion). Nicotine stimulates the release of arginine vasopressin, and thus may be significant in the aetiology of water intoxication and SIADH. Other associated factors in SIADH (according to Singh *et al*) are stress, head injury, medications (antipsychotics, anti-convulsants, diuretics, and anti-cancer drugs), and various medical conditions (especially malignancies).

If, as the authors imply, drinking large quantities of water is a culturally accepted practice in traditional Chinese medicine, I wonder if this girl's complications are unusual, and if so, why she specifically was so adversely affected.

The seeking of an ASC may be an aetiological link in a proportion of compulsive drinkers. It is not, however, a 'missing' link.

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Risk factors in schizophrenia

SIR: In their elegant study Baron & Gruen (*Journal*, April 1988, 152, 460–465) found a greater familial risk for schizophrenia and schizophrenic spectrum disorders among probands born in the winter and spring than among those born during the remainder of the year. This finding is not in line with the major part of the pre-existing literature (Torrey, 1987), which primarily indicates an opposite trend. Aside from the results, the study also differs from previous ones in that it also considers the specific morbidity risk in first-degree relatives. In light of these discrepancies, we undertook a study to confirm whether schizophrenics born between December and April differ from those born during the other months of the year, both in relation to incidence of a family history of schizophrenia and to a familial morbidity risk for