

Guessing game over increase in diabetes

Dear Sir,

According to a recent report, the incidence of childhood diabetes mellitus has doubled in the last 10 years (Pulse, June 25).

Although the author of the study on which this conclusion is based, Dr Sarah Stewart-Brown, says she is unwilling to speculate on the cause for it, she speculates that some toxic substance, such as a preservative or food additive, might be to blame.

It is fascinating how one's medical thinking is coloured by current fashions. Ten years ago, before total allergy syndrome was more than a gleam in some American specialist's eye, our first thought would certainly have been to look for a virus agent as the cause. We could still do so today. After all, the evidence is all there.

In the last decade or so, comprehensive education has swept the country, and so more children are spending their time in large schools, with a correspondingly increased reservoir of infection. Well, it's possible.

Turning the clock back even further, say a century or so, the crop of new diabetics would be attributed to the inhuman hours small children were required to work, and their failure to evacuate their bowels daily.

And if we could see our medieval counterparts making their own conjectures, they might very well attribute the change to the shameful increase in venery among the parents of the unfortunate children.

This might be a not unreasonable hypothesis for today, the possible mediator being toxins from sub-clinical sexually transmitted infections, or even the Pill, on the developing foetus.

All these ideas are at least as reasonable as that of food additives being to blame. After all, it is not the adding of chemicals to food which has increased in the last decade, but the admission of the fact on the label.

I'm sure Golden Shred and Spangles had just as much tartrazine in them when I was a lad.

And if, as the study shows, it is the higher-class kids who are

knocking off their pancreas, we must laugh the additive theory out of court, for these are the kids who have been fed since parturition on breast milk, muesli and wholemeal lentils, while their working-class contemporaries struggled by on powdered baby milk.

It's all very well being critical, but fear not, I have my own, far more plausible, explanation of these results, which will be seen as the only commonsense view by all practical GPs.

It's clear to anyone with any wits that today's kids just aren't what they used to be.

**Dr Jon Garvey,
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