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Rapid Responses to:

CLINICAL REVIEW:

Michael J Sladden and Graham A Johnston

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More common skin infections in children

BMJ 2005; 330: 1194-1198 [\[Full text\]](#)

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Joanna Ibarra, Frances Fry, Clarice Wickenden, Jane L. Smith (16 June 2005)

Does shaving cure headlice?

20 May 2005



James A Dickinson,
Prof of Family Medicine
Dept of Family
Medicine, UCMC North
Hill, Calgary, AB T2N
1M7

The article about skin infections describes the uncertain state of treatments for headlice. Many parents are dubious about using insecticides on the heads of their children. In historical times, I understand that shaving was the recommended treatment, and led to the fashion of wearing wigs to cover the naked scalp. Would this be an effective non-chemical treatment that could be offered to such patients?

Send response to journal:

[Re: Does shaving cure headlice?](#)

Competing interests: None declared

Shaving is safer for head lice than insecticides

22 May 2005



Anthony Lwegaba,
lecturer in Public
Health,
SCMR, University of
West Indies, Cave Hill,

I would like to thank Sladden MJ and Johnson GA for their clinical reviews on common skin infections in children in BMJ 2004; 329: 95-99 and BMJ 2005; 330: 1194-1198.

Barbados

Send response to journal:

[Re: Shaving is safer for head lice than insecticides](#)

The life cycle of head lice (*pediculosis capitis*) was well described and is similar to pubic lice. I worked in chronic emergencies in Somalia in 1993 and Sudan 1996-97 among internally displaced populations and in the nomadic Karimajong of Uganda in 1998-99, whose poor hygiene would be good breeding ground for head lice. However, head lice was never a clinical problem, because those populations simple as they may be, know how to interrupt its life cycle very well and shave off the hair, the only place where the eggs (nits) are anchored and glued close to the skin. As it was rightly pointed out lice outside the hair is not transmissible and does not cause infestation.

I recall that in one institution for the mentally handicapped children in Uganda in the 1970s, there was massive poisoning and some deaths because children licked their insecticide treated hair! In March 2005, I mentioned to surprised colleagues that hair shaving is a good riddance of both pubic and head lice, who disagreed and preferred the treatment with insecticide with all their attendant poisonous risk as outlined. Shaving off hair in many communities has become a fashion propagated by famous sports stars. It was and is common practice for schools, military, prisons to encourage short hair or shaving. In my consultations for postnatal, family planning and genitourinary patients; the majority especially females have cleanly shaven pubic hair. Shaving is therefore not distasteful. But none of the treatment and control advice on the major websites US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, NIH and World Health Organisation mentions shaving. Is it because a doctor's powerful role includes prescribing medicines, in this case poisonous insecticides? Given the obvious facts about the lifecycle do we need to do a randomized controlled study on shaving to recommend it? Is there an alternative place for eggs to anchor after hair has been shaved off? Yes, there are may be some people that may not wish to shave; but wishes could be out weighed by the burden of the infestation, such as pruritus.

Competing interests: None declared

Scabies

23 May 2005



JK Anand,
Retired public health
physician
N/A

Send response to journal:

[Re: Scabies](#)

I thank Drs Sladden and Johnston for a succinct review (21 May, pp1194 -8).

Could they please also tell us the number of cases each year seen by them in Leicester in the past few years, in the context of their catchment population? There are no national statistics, I presume. Also, perhaps many cases are treated by the general practitioners and do not get linked to the hospital data. Secondly, was there any good pharmacological reason why sulphur ointment (the only reliable treatment in my youth) was ditched? I know it causes sensitivity sometimes and also it is rather unpleasant. However, its "toxicity" surely is not in the same league as that of the newer drugs.

Dr JK Anand

Competing interests: None declared

Common skin infections in children - author's response

28 May 2005



Michael J Sladden,
SpR Dermatology
Leicester, LE15WW

Send response to journal:

[Re: Common skin infections in children - author's response](#)

Many thanks for the interest in our recent article.

Shaving the head would be extremely effective at eliminating head lice. No hair, no home for the lice, therefore no lice. Shaving will be acceptable in some cultures, but not others. I am not usually successful at persuading patients to cut infested-hair, let alone shave it all off. Certainly in some communities, people shave their heads to raise money for charity or to copy fashionable sports stars. Thus, shaving is a badge of honour, as my friend and mentor (JAD)