

points out. Presumably, it was the reason for military crew cuts, and for nuns being shaved under their cowls in the old days (JAD). Personally, if I got head lice, I would shave my head and not use insecticides.

I found one article on Medline which suggested that shaving is unsafe / inappropriate. However, this was not based on any clear evidence and I would give the article little credence.

As far as scabies is concerned, we do not record the number of cases, and I expect there are no national figures. Most cases are treated appropriately, effectively and excellently by GPs, and we would only see a small percentage of cases.

The issue about using sulphur ointment is very interesting. We have not treated scabies with sulphur ointment. I am not sure about its historical use or why it was 'ditched'. There are some reports on Medline suggesting that it might be safe and effective. However, it is not recommended in any of the national guidelines located during our literature search.

Mike Sladden

Competing interests: None declared

Practicalities of treatment

31 May 2005 ▲▼▲

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Whilst I welcome articles about common conditions, I too wonder about the experience of the authors.

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journal:
[Re: Practicalities of
treatment](#)

The phrase 'under medical supervision' is used in the treatment of scabies and head lice. what does this mean in practical terms or is it a reflection of the pharmacists inability to sell the product in these circumstances? I cannot envisage any useful or practical form of direct supervision of treatment

The use of wet combing is dismissed due to lack of evidence but as a parent whose children were reinfested frequently its use with conditioner was a pragmatic alternative to shaving the head or repeated doses of treatment.

Finally, you suggest that parents should liaise with the school. As a GP and parent, I am aware that head lice infestation is an emotive topic and schools have little ability to do anything other than send a letter. You might become aware that the head teacher is tearing their own hair out.

Competing interests: None declared

Head lice: Accurate knowledge of the life-cycle is essential to achieve control

16 June 2005 ▲ ▲

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We are concerned that, in common with numerous publications offering guidance on treatment, Sladden and Johnston, (1) give incorrect information on the duration of the egg stage of *Pediculus capitis*. Hatching may occur later than the seven days stated, to at least ten days post laying. This fact, which has important implications for treatment advice, was recorded by Buxton in 1947 in a masterly reference work on the lice which infest humans (2). We are not aware of any robust research which challenges this; indeed, our own investigations developing the Bug Busting wet combing method confirm that the incubation period often lasts ten days. It follows that two doses of a product that may not kill the egg, applied a week apart (i.e. on day 1 and 8) will not reliably eradicate an infestation because some lice may hatch after the second

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