



## From the Clinical Director

'Twas the nocturnal segment of the diurnal period preceding the annual Yuletide celebration, & throughout our residence, kinetic activity was not in evidence, including the domestic rodent *Mus musculus*. Hosiery was suspended from the edge of the wood burning apparatus, pursuant to anticipatory pleasure of an imminent visitation from an eccentric philanthropist (St. Nicholas).

The prepubescent siblings, ensconced in accommodations of repose, were experiencing subconscious visual hallucinations of variegated fruit confections moving through their cerebrums.

The conjugal partner and I, attired in our nocturnal head coverings, were about to take slumberous advantage of the hibernal darkness when upon the upper exterior portion of the grounds there ascended such a cacophony of dissonance that I felt compelled to arise from repose to ascertain the precise source thereof.

Hastening to the casement, I opened the barriers sealing this fenestration, noting that the lunar brilliance without, reflected as it was on the surface of a recent crystalline precipitation, might be said to rival that of the solar meridian itself.

My incredulous optical sensory organs beheld a miniature airborne conveyance drawn by eight diminutive specimens of the genus *Rangifer*, piloted by a minuscule, aged chauffeur so ebullient and nimble that it became instantly apparent to me that he was indeed our anticipated caller.

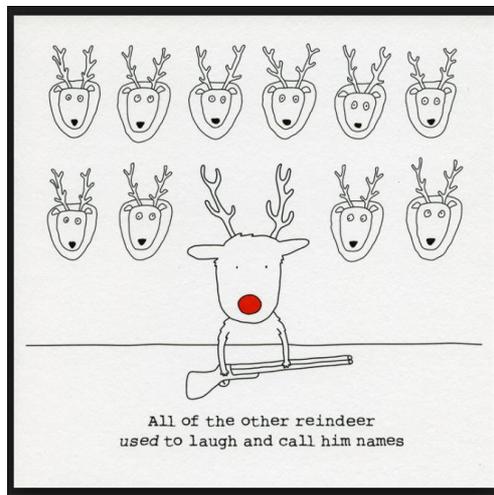
He vociferated loudly, expelled breath musically through contracted labia, and addressed each of the octet by his or her respective cognomen - "Now Dasher, now Dancer..." et al. - guiding them to the uppermost exterior level of our abode, through which I could distinguish the concatenations of each of the 32 cloven pedal extremities.

As I retracted my cranium and was performing a 180-degree pivot, our distinguished visitant achieved, with utmost celerity and via a downward leap, entry by way of the smoke passage. He was clad entirely in animal pelts soiled by the residue from oxidation of carboniferous fuels accumulated on the walls thereof. His resemblance to a street vendor I attributed largely to the plethora of assorted playthings he bore dorsally in a commodious cloth receptacle. His orbs were scintillant with luminosity, while his submaxillary dermal indentations gave evidence of engaging amiability. The capillaries of his malar regions and nasal appurtenance were engorged with blood which suffused the subcutaneous layers, the former approximating the coloration of Albion's floral emblem, the latter that of the *Prunus avium*, or sweet cherry. His amusing sublabials and supralabials resembled a common loop knot, and their ambient hirsute facial adornment appeared like small, tabular and columnar crystals of frozen water.

***Throughout our residence, kinetic activity was not in evidence, not even *Mus musculus*...***

Clenched between his incisors was a smoking implement whose grey fumes, forming an ellipse about his occiput, suggestive of a decorative circlet of holly. His visage was wider than it was high, and when he waxed audibly mirthful, his corpulent abdominal region undulated in the manner of impectinated fruit syrup. He was an obese, jocund, gnome, rendering me visibly frolicsome my effort to refrain. Rapidly lowering and then elevating one eyelid and rotating his head slightly to one side, he indicated that trepidation on my part was groundless. Without utterance, he commenced filling the hosiery with various articles extracted from his dorsally transported cloth receptacle. Thereafter, he executed an abrupt about-face, placed a single manual digit in lateral juxtaposition to his olfactory organ, inclined his cranium forward and effected his egress by renegotiating the smoke passage. He then propelled himself in a short vector onto his conveyance, directed a musical expulsion of air through his contracted oral sphincter to the antlered quadrupeds of burden, and soared aloft in a movement hitherto observable chiefly among the seed-bearing portions of a common weed. But I overheard his parting exclamation, audible immediately prior to his vehiculation beyond the limits of visibility: "Ecstatic Yuletide to the planetary constituency, and to that self-same assemblage, sincerest wishes for a salubriously beneficial and gratifyingly pleasurable period between sunset and dawn."

*Or, in the interests of clear communication: The festive season is a lovely time of year – we at Ward MM wish you every happiness and a safe and enjoyable break!*



## Feature Article: Christmas musings

### *Dreaming of a White Christmas*

Dutch researchers have recently examined the propensity of people to "Dream of a White Christmas." The subjects (undergraduate university students) were asked to listen to "white noise" through headphones, and to press a button when they thought they heard Bing Crosby's "White Christmas." Surprisingly, although the song was not played at all, 32% of subjects did press the button! The researchers comment that these participants had higher scores on fantasy proneness and the Launay-Slade Hallucination Scale (LSHS).

### *Beware the Christmas Tree*

North American research suggests that seasonal workers working on Christmas tree plantations have a highly variable level of knowledge about the pesticide products used in the growing process. It seems that Christmas trees may be laden with more than just glass baubles. Another report describes a case of bird fancier's lung in a patient who had previously developed alveolitis associated with an allergy to her pet budgerigar. Apparently, the recurrence could be traced to allergens on her Christmas tree. Other reports of Christmas tree carnage include major traumatic eye injuries.

### *Go easy...*

Finnish research shows that alcohol sales increase at Christmas (well hello). What is perhaps of greater concern is the demonstrable increase in fatal alcohol poisoning that accompanies this phenomenon. It was estimated that for every 1% increase in spirit sales, there is an accompanying 0.4% increase in fatal alcohol poisoning. The authors suggest that these findings could be used in efforts to address the problem of hard drinking.

### *Effects of Christmas Dinner*

Research in the BMJ confirms that both diabetic and non-diabetic subjects gained weight over the Christmas period, and that this weight-gain was sustained in January. There were slight but significant rises in the serum concentrations of triglycerides and cholesterol. The authors wryly observed that their study "is not likely to affect any future Christmas."

### *Santa Psychosis*

A case-report published in the Medical Journal of Australia provides a tongue-in-cheek description of a dishevelled elderly

man found wandering and confused on 24 December. Over the following 24 hours he became increasingly jovial and was said to have absconded at the hour of midnight on the 25th December. The differential diagnoses included hypomania, alcohol withdrawal and Munchausen's syndrome.

Although the **EXACT** historical details are sometimes debated, it is generally agreed that at time of the first **CHRISTMAS** three **WISE** men followed the brightest of **STARS** (perhaps a **COMET**) to the place where a **GREAT** event took place. A child had been born – many said he had come to **SAVE** mankind.

Since that time, we have continued to celebrate **CHRISTMAS**, with family and friends gathering to **FEAST**, and to open the presents that appeared like **MAGIC** beneath the tree! Old Uncle **HAROLD** proposes the **TOAST** after the **CHRISTMAS** pudding. We play **CHRISTMAS MUSIC** and the happy children make **CHAOS** that brings a **SMILE** to our faces.

**EXACT** – Extended Release Adalat Canadian Trial (Clin Ther 1997; 19: 924-35)

**CHRISTMAS** – Carvedilol Hibernation Reversible Ischaemia Trial, Marker of Success (Int J Cardiol 2000; 72: 265-74)

**WISE** – Women's Ischaemia Syndrome Evaluation (Eur Heart J 2003; 24: 1506-14)

**STARS** – Stent Anti-thrombotic Regimen Study (J Am Coll Cardiol 1999; 34: 698-706)

**COMET** – Carvedilol Or Metoprolol European Trial (Heart 1999; 82 (suppl 4): 14-22)

**GREAT** – Grampian Region Early Anistreplase Trial (BMJ 1992; 305: 548-53)

**SAVE** – Survival And Ventricular Enlargement (N Eng J Med 1992; 327: 669-77)

**FEAST** – FE (iron) and Atherosclerosis Trial (Am Heart J 2000; 139: 337-45)

**MAGIC** – MAGnesium in Coronaries (Am Heart J 2000; 139: 23-31)

**HAROLD** – Hypertension and Ambulatory Recording in the OLD (Aging 1997; 5: 365-71)

**MUSIC** – Multicenter Ultrasound Stent In Coronaries (Eur Heart J 1998; 19: 1214-23)

**CHAOS** – Cambridge Heart AntiOxidant Study (Lancet 1996; 347: 781-6)

**SMILE** – Survival of Myocardial Infarction Long-term Evaluation (N Engl J Med 1995; 332 802-8)

**HOPE** – Heart Outcomes Prevention Evaluation study (Circulation 2003; 107: 251-7)

*Dr Chris Alderman, Director of Clinical Excellence, Ward MM.*

## Quick Tip

### Important Public Service Announcement- DHMO

It view of a significant safety hazard that we have become aware of; we feel that it is our civic duty to disseminate some important public information.

- This information relates to Dihydrogen monoxide (DHMO), a colorless, odorless, tasteless substance that kills thousands of people every year. Most of these deaths result from accidental inhalation, but there are other dangers.
- Alarmingly, DHMO has been found in large amounts in almost every river, lake, and reservoir, and is even present in Antarctic ice: DHMO is dumped into rivers and the ocean, and nothing can be done to stop this because the practice remains legal. It is often used as an industrial solvent and coolant, in nuclear power plants, and as a fire retardant. It is implicated in the distribution of pesticides, and even after washing, produce remains contaminated. DHMO is universally present in "junk-foods." Military organizations receive tons of DHMO through a highly sophisticated distribution network hidden underground, storing large quantities of DHMO for later use.
- For more information, see [www.dhmo.org](http://www.dhmo.org), an unbiased data clearinghouse and a forum for public discussion.

*Dr Chris Alderman, Director of Clinical Excellence, Ward MM.*

## Latest News

### Interpretation of medical literature – a primer:

An important function served by any periodical publication dealing with the therapeutics is to assist in the interpretation of biomedical literature. With the holidays just around the corner, and the opportunity to catch up on some professional reading, we offer the following guidance on the interpretation of phraseology that is sometimes encountered.

*"It has long been known":*

We're unable to locate a supporting reference.

*"A definite trend is evident":*

The data are practically meaningless.

*"It has not been possible to provide definite answers":*

But we still hope to get it published.

*"Three of the samples were chosen for detailed study":*

The other results didn't make any sense.

*"Typical results are shown":*

This is the prettiest graph.

*"In my experience":*

Once.

*"In case after case":*

Twice.

*"In a series of cases":*

Three times.

*"It is believed that":*

I think that.

*"It is generally believed that":*

A couple of others think so, too.

*"A careful analysis of available data":*

What was left after I knocked over my coffee mug.

# Your Questions Answered

## Notes from facilities serviced by Ward MM

*It is quite common for us to receive similar enquiries from more than one facility in our network. In this section we summarise questions with a common basis – as a part of our “connect – network – share” ethos, we share the information with all of our facilities.*

*Q. “We often hear about problems when people taking medicine also drink alcohol – what is really important?”*

A. Alcohol has the potential to interact with medications either through the metabolic pathways in the liver or by enhancing the effects of concurrent medications on the central nervous system. The nature of these interactions can also differ between chronic and acute alcohol consumption.

Alcohol is mainly metabolized in the liver to acetaldehyde. It is acetaldehyde that causes symptoms such as flushing, headache and vomiting. Medications that block the breakdown of acetaldehyde will increase the risk of these unpleasant symptoms. Examples are metronidazole, tinidazole, griseofulvin and disulfiram. Avoidance of alcohol during and for at least 24 hours after the last dose of these medications is recommended to avoid the so-called “disulfiram-like” effect.

When alcohol is used in combination with other medications acting on the central nervous system, such as benzodiazepines, antipsychotics, sedating antidepressants, antihistamines, opioids and antiepileptic medications, additional sedation and drowsiness can be expected. The resultant decrease in motor skills can lead to an increased falls risk.

Avoidance of alcoholic drinks that contain tyramine (red wine and some beers) is necessary whilst on treatment with a non-selective monoamine oxidase inhibitor such as phenelzine or tranylcypromine. In addition to increased CNS effects, hypertensive crisis and/or postural hypotension can occur.

The regular consumption of alcohol by those with chronic diseases, particularly if also taking medications that increase liver disease, gastro-intestinal bleeding or falls, can pose additional risks. For example, cardiovascular medications with vasodilating effects such as glyceryl trinitrate can increase orthostatic hypotension. The gastric-irritant effects of medications such as prednisolone and NSAIDs can be exacerbated. Alcohol also increases the risk of hypoglycaemia especially in a person with diabetes or if being treated with insulin or an oral hypoglycaemic medication. Metformin may cause increased levels of lactic acid in the blood especially in those with chronic alcohol abuse. Modest alcohol consumption in the absence of liver disease is generally considered safe in those who take paracetamol.

Alcohol also interacts with warfarin. The frequency of alcohol consumption can lead to either an increase or a decrease in the anticoagulant effect of warfarin. Chronic alcohol consumption causes a decrease in the effectiveness of warfarin with a resultant increase in clot formation whilst binge drinking can decrease warfarin's metabolism increasing the risk of bleeding. The consumption of 1-2 standard drinks per day is generally considered to be safe.

The clinical significance of an interaction with alcohol depends on both the medications involved and a person's susceptibility to having an adverse outcome. Older people are at a higher risk for harmful alcohol related medication interactions due to a decrease in the body's ability to break down alcohol especially in the presence of chronic disease and polypharmacy.

*Csilla Burt, Clinical Pharmacist, Ward MM*



## Meet your Ward MM Team Member

Sue Ward founded Ward MM in 1997. From modest beginnings, she built Ward MM to become Australia's largest and most sophisticated provider of Aged Care Pharmacy Services. Sue is the cultural leader of Ward MM, with an attitude that is based upon the belief that “the resident is at the heart of everything we do.”

A Veteran of literally thousands of medication reviews that have been conducted around Australia, Sue does not need the occasion of Christmas to share the gift of her generous guidance to assist in eliminating medication-related harm amongst older people. To add to this, Sue readily provides leadership to pharmacists developing their skills in medication review, contributing to the future of the profession.

A self-confessed red enthusiast of vivid red lipstick, Sue is an instantly recognisable figure in the Aged Care facilities she visits around the country, in many cases located in towns far away from her home in Melbourne. Less well known than her medication review skills, Sue also has considerable talent in the kitchen, as those of us who have been lucky enough to sample her cooking know well.

These days Sue Ward has another important role that she enjoys very much, as grandmother to Chloe Ward – they spend many happy hours together and especially enjoy the time they spend together at the zoo.