



# Mail

## More on herpes zoster lesions

To the Editors,  
The May 1999 Med.Pix feature by Usatine and Clemente, "Is herpes zoster unilateral?", nicely demonstrated the anatomic basis for bilateral herpetic skin lesions with unilateral spinal nerve involvement.<sup>1</sup> That the medial branch of the posterior primary ramus extends for some distance across the midline can be useful in the clinical evaluation of an apparent sensory deficit. In a patient with organic sensory deficit, the area of sensory loss often stops short of the midline because of the overlap of sensory fibers from both sides. On the other hand, the pinprick deficit in patients with functional loss or malingering often stops precisely at the midline,<sup>2</sup> which, of course, makes no sense anatomically.

Jerome Litvinoff  
PO Box 601910  
San Diego, CA 92160-1910

---

#### Reference

- 1 Usatine RP, Clemente C. Is herpes zoster unilateral? *West J Med* 1999;170:263.
- 2 DeJong RN. *The neurologic examination*. 2nd ed. New York: Hoeber-Harper; 1958, pp 68, 940.

## Should doctors disclose mistakes?

To the Editors,  
I read with interest the article on disclosure of mistakes<sup>1,2</sup> while on duty in my emergency department in the Sierra foothills.

I agree that mistakes should be disclosed, but disclosure is less awkward if more information is given before procedures and the foreseeable complications and risks have been explained. To then have an "unfortunate but foreseeable" complication occur seems less troubling to patients. That their physician made every effort to appropriately manage their case and to explain possible consequences may only instill greater trust.

Complications of procedures occur in the best of hands, some due to errors, some to bad luck, and some to unique patient factors. Patients will have more realistic expectations if the realities of practice got more air time than the fantasies portrayed on "ER."

Kenneth K Renwick, Jr  
Mark Twain St Joseph's Hospital  
768 Mountain Ranch Rd  
San Andreas, CA 95249

---

#### Reference

- 1 Hingorani M, Wong T, Vafidis G. Attitudes after unintended injury during treatment: a survey of doctors and patients. *West J Med* 1999;171:81-82.
- 2 Greely HT. Do physicians have a duty to disclose mistakes? [commentary] *West J Med* 1999;171:82-83.