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- Carrots may be good for Bugs Bunny but not necessarily for humans (Science 1996 271;441). Animal studies had suggested a clear benefit from carotene in regard to the development of cancer. However, two large randomized controlled trials with carotene supplementation in humans failed to confirm this. Indeed, one trial was stopped because there were more deaths in the treatment group than in the placebo group.
- Cocaine given to rats has a harmful effect on their Sertoli cell function (J Urol 1996;155:163).
- It has been estimated that if testicular self-examination reduced mortality from cancer by half (an unproven assumption), 50,000 men would have to carry out regular self-examination for ten years to prevent one death (J Med Screen 1996;3:2).
- A woman in California (where else) injected herself with a ground-up black widow spider to see what kind of "high" she would get (Globe & Mail 4.6.96). The high included a blood pressure of 188/108, tachycardia of 188, broncho-spasm, and severe muscle cramps. In addition to first-aid and many pharmacological agents, her treatment included a psychiatric consultation. The latter would seem to be the most relevant.
- Did you know that there is now a "Journal of Image Guided Surgery"? What have we been doing all these years?
- Of health care workers regularly exposed to latex, seven to ten percent have a positive skin test result to latex proteins. One-third of these do not yet have symptoms of latex allergy (Ann Intern Med 1995;122:43).
- A hospital in Britain has caused some controversy by giving fertility treatment to a 30-year-old, infertile, HIV-positive woman (Guardian Weekly

19.5.96). I wonder how long it will be before a group representing tax payers challenges this use of the health care budget and asks for a transfer of the financial responsibility for the orphaned offspring.

- In a previous edition, I reported a study showing the preference of female patients for female physicians.

Florence Nightingale commented on the same situation in her book *Introductory Notes on Lying-in Institutions* in 1871:

"We may safely say that no lying-in would be attended but by a woman if a woman were as skillful as a man—a physician accoucheur.... Although every woman would prefer a woman to attend upon her in her lying-in and in disease peculiar to her and her children, yet the woman does not exist, or hardly exists, to do it. Midwives are so ignorant that it is almost a term of contempt. Surely it is the first object to enable women, by the most thorough training, practical and scientific, to practise that branch of the art of medicine which all are agreed should be theirs...as physician accoucheuses; that is to attend and to be consulted in all deliveries, abnormal as well as normal, in disease of women and children."

A century and a quarter later these requirements have been met and the Virginia Slims criterion has been fulfilled.

Florence Nightingale's writings are a pleasure to read. She was well ahead of her time and got most things right. She was from the "Get on with it" school. She wasn't impeded by sexual antagonism; "I am brutally indifferent to the wrongs or rights of my sex." In 1861, she started a training school for midwives in London (Arch Dis Child 1996;74:F219).