Re: Toxic lead exposure via an unusual source
In the Jan/Feb BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) article [BCMJ 2019;61:41], authors refer to an ayurvedic herbal remedy as an unusual source of toxic lead exposure. In fact, ayurvedic herbal medicine has been well documented to contain toxic lead levels.1,2 The BCCDC article serves as a reminder of the importance of inquiring into a patient’s use of complementary and alternative medicine as an integral part of history taking. The use of ayurvedic medicine and potential lead poisoning can be readily identified, and that identification may have saved many emergency room visits, medical visits, and extensive investigations in this patient’s case.

Ayurvedic herbal medicine from India and Chinese herbal medicine are the two most common complementary and alternative medicines that may contain lead and other heavy metals.3 In addition, some children’s costume jewelry has been reported as an unusual source of toxic lead exposure.3

—H.C. George Wong, MD, FRCPC
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References

Re: Cannabis use by adolescents
I thank Dr Ocana for his insightful article, “Cannabis use by adolescents: Practical implications for clinicians” [BCMJ 2018;61:14-19]. I would, however, question his conclusion that “there are more accidental overdoses and deaths...” attributed to the legalization of cannabis. His reference for this statement mentions a single death due to myocarditis in an 11-month-old who tested positive for THC. In a Washington Post article about that case, the child was said to be in an “unstable motel-living situation” with parents who admitted to multiple drug possessions, including marijuana. No causal relationship was suggested in the case report described in that article, and the death was attributed to myocarditis, not marijuana exposure.2 In fact, authors of the case report noted, “As of this writing, this is the first reported pediatric death associated with cannabis exposure.”2 Also in the article, “Nappe emphasized that the word ‘associated’ should not be interpreted as indicating a cause and effect.”2 I would also question the conclusion that cannabis legalization has led to more overdoses. Certainly legalization has been associated with more reported overdoses, but this could reflect willingness of parents to report accidental exposure because of decriminalization.

—Mike Figurski, MD, CA-CPHIMS
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References