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# Focus on Health

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## Physician Deaths

A recent study revealed that the leading cause of premature (defined as before age 90) death among physicians is suicide. Male doctors are three times as likely and female physicians six times as likely as the average population in this country to commit suicide. Stress was considered to be a major if not the leading cause.

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## Post Exercise Indicators

A decade long study of over 29,000 patients at the Cleveland Clinic reports that the presence of irregular heart beats in the minutes after a treadmill EKG (stress cardiogram) is a better predictor of the risk of death within five years than what happens while the person is exercising.

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## HRT and Breast Cancer

Women who have been on hormone replacement therapy before being diagnosed with breast cancer have a significantly reduced risk of bone metastases. The hypothesis is that healthy bone with normal bone turnover provides an infertile soil for tumor-seeding cells.

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## Autoimmune Diseases

Autoimmune diseases are caused by the body's immune system gone haywire – attacking tissues inappropriately. More and more diseases are being tied to this phenomenon. The biggest risk factor is the presence of two X – chromosomes – in other words, being female. Autoimmune diseases are among the top 10 causes of death of young and middle-aged women in the United States. A woman's immune system is more active than a man's. The culprits are genes, but an "environmental trigger" is also necessary. Example: A streptococcus infection can trigger rheumatic fever, psychiatric diseases such as obsessive-compulsive disorder or Tourette syndrome. Other triggers may be Cocksackie virus (myocarditis), sunlight (lupus), deranged hormones, exposure to solvents or chemicals, etc.

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## Non-Oral Estrogen Good for Heart

A study done at UT Southwestern Medical Center here in Dallas compared women given non-oral estrogen with women given oral estrogen or placebo. The results showed that C Reactive protein levels, a marker for inflammation in blood vessels and a strong predictor of adverse cardiovascular events in otherwise healthy women, doubled in women taking oral estrogens but remained unchanged in those taking non-oral estrogen (patches, cream, pellets) or placebo. The study's lead author attributed this difference to the "first pass" effect through the liver that occurs when taking estrogen by mouth. Other studies, however, question whether this rise in C Reactive protein reflects increased coronary artery calcifications or inflammation, or is simply a benign association that doesn't raise the risk of a heart attack.

As part of the professional services I feel should be provided by me to my patients, screening of the voluminous medical literature has become more and more important. Please read this now if you have time before I see you, so that we can further discuss whichever topic especially interests you.

Perhaps you have seen an item that I have not included in this list or have not seen myself. If so, feel free to bring it to my attention.

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