In a double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled trial, Soares et al (p 529) report the efficacy of transdermal 17-β estradiol for the treatment of minor and major depression in perimenopausal women. Subjects showed a significant improvement in mood, regardless of the type of depression. Treatment was generally well tolerated. After a 4-week washout period, patients treated with estradiol sustained antidepressant benefit, despite the recrudescence of vasomotor symptoms.

A commentary by Stahl is included.

The occurrence of antidepressant-induced mania is a key issue in the clinical management of bipolar disorder. In this study on the role of the serotonin transporter protein gene in predicting this undesirable effect of antidepressant treatment, Mundo et al (p 539) reported that patients carrying 1 or 2 copies of the short variant of the gene (which also is considered to generate less gene expression) are more likely to develop antidepressant-induced mania. If these results are replicated, the variant of the serotonin transporter protein gene may become an important predictor of abnormal response to medication in patients with bipolar disorder.

Glia cells greatly outnumber neurons in the cortex and are vital for normal neuronal function. In a postmortem investigation, Cotter et al (p 545) examined glial cell density and neuronal size in the anterior cingulate cortex among subjects with major depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and normal controls. Compared with controls, subjects with major depression showed reduced glial cell density and reduced neuronal size in layer 6. There was also some evidence for reduced glial cell density in schizophrenia.

A commentary by Jablensky and Lawrence is included.

Recent neuroimaging studies of panic disorder have suggested dysfunction in the inhibitory GABA neuronal system. Consistent with this previous work, Goddard et al (p 556) report abnormal reductions in occipital cortex GABA levels in a group of unmedicated patients with active panic disorder, using a novel magnetic resonance spectroscopic technique. The data indicate that low occipital cortex GABA is associated with the panic disorder diagnosis itself rather than illness severity.

Personality disorders are frequent among psychiatric patients. However, the prevalence in the common population is largely unknown. In the first study of a larger representative sample of the common population, Torgersen et al (p 590) have found that 1 of 8 individuals in the main city of Norway has a personality disorder.