low among nurses in a medical intensive care unit *where all nurses wore gloves,* the authors investigated the source of the scourge. Sure enough, they found that 11.1% of vinyl gloves they examined leaked water, whereas only 1.4% of the latex gloves did the same. The authors noted that no latex gloves passed herpes virus, but nevertheless recommended that glove manufacturers improve their standards. Although the case repulsed me, I still was unsure how the manufacturing practices of gloves 2 decades ago informed the current situation, in 2012. Oddly, I was reassured by the results for the latex gloves, which seemed to have passed, despite obviously medieval glove manufacturing standards in the late 1980s.

Sometimes the facts are not the facts.

A lot rested on the last paper, reference 159, "Examination Gloves as Barriers to Hand Contamination in Clinical Practice."[6] It was the most recent study, published in 1993, and appeared in the most prominent journal. It was a study of *nonsterile* gloves, used for 1 of 3 routine purposes: among respiratory therapists cleaning endotracheal tubes, nurses performing digital rectal examinations on patients with spinal cord injuries, and dentists in routine practice. Nearly 13% of gloved hands later showed contamination after routine use, though only 1 case involved a latex (as opposed to vinyl) glove. This was the closest I got to a relevant fact. Because a single *nonsterile* latex glove may have permitted contamination of a hand after dentistry or digital rectal examination 30 years ago, I should wash my hands before applying *sterile* latex gloves to place a central line in 2012, even though I washed my hands not 5 minutes before. To me, the facts were less than ironclad.

My long journey to learn the source of a fact reminded me of a conversation I had, with my friend the chemical engineer, while having bubble tea.

"I wonder why they float the way they do?" I asked.

"I can tell you this," he responded, "If you are curious about that question, you could take 2 semesters of fluid flow and mechanics. At the end of that time, I can't promise you'll have the answer, but I can promise that you won't care." I felt the same way at the end of my handwashing quest. By the time I had gotten to the bottom of it, I wished I had washed my hands.

The trouble with facts is that we tend to give them all the same weight when often they represent very different knowledge claims. Trainees, I fear, take all facts they are given at face value, handling each one with great care. But, sometimes the facts are not the facts, pearls are glass beads and depth of understanding is more important than pointing out the next quick fact.

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Correspondence to: Vinay Prasad, v-prasad@md.northwestern.edu

Affiliation: Vinay Prasad is with the Department of Medicine, Northwestern University, Chicago, Ill.

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Holiday reading acknowledgements

CMAJ's call for entertaining Holiday Reading fare generated a record-breaking number of submissions, prompting some spirited judging. Thank you to our esteemed panel of judges, Kate Brown, Kelly Clarke, Sarah Currie, Erin Driscoll, Wayne Kondro and Erin Russell, as well as to our talented designer Carole Lalonde. And a special thank you to everyone who submitted articles, poems and other holiday missives.

We hope our collective efforts bring you an hour or so of good reading over the holidays. — Barbara Sibbald, Deputy Editor, Analysis and Humanities, *CMAJ*

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