

Editorial

The public profile of food allergy

It was very pleasing that at the 2005 Annual Congress of the European Respiratory Society there was a plenary session on food allergy. It was incredibly well attended in an extremely large lecture hall. That pulmonologists should be interested in food allergy is a very considerable advance. In the past food allergy has received a rather bad press as far as the pulmonologist is concerned. Many have not considered it to have any part to play in the diseases they treat. However, recent studies clearly identify that food allergy plays a significant role in particularly severe and brittle asthma and clearly is a very common starting point for the allergic march through to asthma.

The public profile of food allergy has been even more problematic. It has been considered the refuge of complementary medicine polarizing opinions to either total rejection of the concept that it is a problem through to a belief that food allergy is the cause of all ills. At least in the UK, the media's publicizing of food-induced anaphylactic catastrophes has raised public awareness of this as a problem and remarkably even comes to the attention of our politicians who, at least now, are beginning to consider whether there should be an increase in provision of allergy services.

Interestingly the increase in media attention to food allergy has been associated with the appearance of food allergy in literature and films. I was amazed to read in the very popular Dan Brown Book, *The Da Vinci Code*, a character being murdered by being fed concealed peanut when he was known to be peanut allergic. A recent film (*Hitch*) had a very amusing scene where the hero developed an allergic reaction during a cooking class leading to facial angioedema and some coughing with a degree of respiratory difficulty. He subsequently overdosed on sedating antihistamines in an attempt to relieve the problem, creating a scene of some hilarity.

While the potential for death associated with food allergy might at least raise awareness of severity of the problem, the trivialization of an acute allergic event in comedy could conceivably have an adverse influence. It is incumbent on all allergists to be aware of issues raised in the media in order to be able to explain them and counter any misconceptions that might arise in our patients' and families' minds.

*J. O. Warner
Editor-in-Chief*