I write this as I am putting the finishing touches to a Simnel cake, one of the most tasty of old recipes. Those of my readers who are familiar with cake-making will realise that a Simnel cake is unusual in having icing in the middle of the cake, not just on top. This reminded me in a curious way of the British Journal of Psychiatry, a journal with shiny yellow icing on the outside but quite a helping of icing in the middle as well. The making of a Simnel cake is a staging process, just as Scott et al. (pp. 243–245) describe, with the marzipan icing, preferably golden like our figures are only marzipan balls.

Icing in the cake

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Getting costs sorted

Any intervention, even a simple one as wholesome as a Simnel cake, has a cost attached. In a mean world we have become aware that cost-effectiveness is now the key issue in deciding who gets what in medical care. But if we are to concentrate on the bottom line we must make sure all the other lines lead correctly to it. A new statement with the oxymoronacronym CHEERS (Consolidated Health Economic Evaluation Reporting Standards) has just been published and will be endorsed in our Journal’s instructions to authors. The standards comprise 24 statements extending from a specific statement about the type of economic analysis, its reasoning and perspective, time horizons and outcomes, a clear description of the measurement of effectiveness, valuation of probable outcomes, and, very importantly, the unit of currency, the form of analysis, clear exposition of results with incremental cost-effectiveness ratios (ICERs) when applicable, and finishing appropriately with the source of funding and declarations of interests. I have looked closely at recent studies of cost-utility and cost-effectiveness in the Journal and think most of them have cause to cheer as they have followed the format of this statement but we can always do better. For some subjects that we know are expensive it now also seems essential to include some form of cost analysis if we are going to make any headway in clinical practice. We also implore our prospective authors to combine clinical and cost outcomes in all relevant papers instead of splitting them up into unwieldy bite-sized pieces and publishing them in different journals. Like the icing and cake mixture in a Simnel cake these ingredients are at their best when combined.

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