Letters to the Editor

Painful Digital Fissures

To the Editor:

I read with interest the letter from Dr Windsor, Dr Richards, and Dr Rodway¹ concerning painful fissuring of the fingers that has been seen in those who spend periods of time either at altitude or in polar regions.

I agree that such environments would certainly be associated with the development of these fissures. However, while I am impressed with the suggested mechanism linking diabetes and fissure formation, it is by no means certain. Fissuring of fingers is relatively common, even in temperate climates such as the UK, during the winter months (see Figure). This fissure was acquired in the south of Britain during November, when the ambient temperature did not go below freezing, and while the subject was wear-

ing gloves. The diabetes link, although at first glance tempting, does not seem necessary to explain the fissuring experienced by the climber on Cho Oyu.

It is perhaps more likely that the rest of the climbing team were just fortunate in not being susceptible to this minor, but most unpleasant, condition.

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Reference

1. Windsor JS, Richards P, Rodway G. Painful fissures and diabetes mellitus at altitude. *Wilderness Environ Med.* 2006;17:205–207.

Figure. Healing fissure on finger pulp in a healthy nondiabetic.