

Intestinal worms impair child health in the Philippines

Adam Easton, *Manila*

As many as 9 out of every 10 children in the Philippines could be prone to poor physical and mental development because the problem of intestinal worms has largely gone unchecked, according to the Department of Health.

A nationwide study performed over 10 years by the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports found a prevalence of 50%-90% in children aged 2-14 years. Up to 30% of the population of 22 million children may have one or more of the three most common types of soil transmitted helminths: roundworm, hookworm, and whipworm.

"The common intestinal helminths, or worms, are becoming a major health problem in the country, particularly among children," reported Dr Yvonne Lumampao, manager of the project to control soil transmitted helminths.

The WHO's headquarters in Manila held a regional meeting on these diseases last year after the former prime minister of Japan, Ryutaro Hashimoto, raised the issue. "Most countries were doing nothing. They didn't have

national programmes, and some didn't even have a recognition that it was a problem," pointed out Dr Kevin Palmer, regional adviser in parasitic diseases at the WHO's Manila headquarters.

Infection through ingestion or skin penetration, or both, often affects children's performance in school as it can cause stunted growth, decreased physical activity, and poor physical and mental development, Dr Lumampao said. The most common symptoms of worm infestation are pain, enlargement of the abdomen, loss of appetite



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and weight, vomiting, insomnia, and irregular respiration.

Although worms thrive in tropical climates and are endemic to many developing countries, infestation is easily dealt with. A single dose of albendazole once a year for three years is enough to eradicate worms in a child.

Last year, the health department launched a pilot project in two villages in Aurora province in northern Luzon, where the prevalence had reached 65%. Results have been encouraging so far, and the programme has been supported by local officials. The project's budget was 3m pesos (£46 000). To launch a nationwide scheme to eradicate worms in children would cost at least 100m pesos—money that local officials are not prepared to release from their budgets. □

Scottish doctors launch their manifesto

Linda Beecham, *BMJ*

The Scottish council of the BMA has launched its policy document for the new Scottish parliament, to which responsibility for health will be devolved.

The BMA believes that the new MPs will take a particular interest in health matters—particularly since health makes up one third of the budget—and that there will be increased public scrutiny. The amount of time spent on health is likely to increase from the estimated total of 1½ hours devoted to debating Scottish health matters at Westminster in the last five years of the Conservative administration.

The BMA will be seeking a commitment from the new parliament to an open, responsive, and accountable NHS based on the principles of corporate and clinical governance. The manifesto calls for full consultation with healthcare professionals before any major decisions are made which would change the delivery of health care; an annual report on the state of the NHS in Scotland to be delivered by the health minister to parliament and followed by a debate; an independent watchdog to audit and inspect the performance of the NHS in Scotland; independent clinical advice to be available at all levels; and a review of the remit and role of health boards.

The BMA wants Scottish MPs to commit themselves to safeguard the present level of spending on the health service in Scotland and to abandon the private finance initiative. It also wants the anomalies of prescription charges and exemptions to be reviewed as a matter of urgency. It suggests that a statutory committee should be set up to investigate the issues arising from new developments and priority setting, and it wants the Scottish parliament to make open and explicit decisions about rationing. □

Partners in Care: the BMA and the New Scottish Parliament is available from the BMA Scottish Office, 3 Hill Place, Edinburgh EH8 9EQ.

US doctors file lawsuit against antiabortionists

Fred Charatan, *Florida*

A civil lawsuit has been filed against several antiabortion groups in a Portland, Oregon, federal court by Planned Parenthood and a group of doctors who perform abortions.

The suit has been brought under the 1994 federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, which makes it illegal to use "force or threat of force" against anyone seeking or providing an abortion. The law allows clinics to seek unlimited damages if workers are harmed or intimidated. The defendants are named as the American Coalition of Life Activists, the Portland based Advocates for Life Ministries, and

prominent members of the US antiabortion movement.

The suit seeks \$200m (£125m) in damages and an injunction that could bar abortion opponents from circulating material on the internet that plaintiffs say threatens the lives and wellbeing of abortion providers. The defendants claim their internet material merely distributes information available in telephone directories, and their opinions are constitutionally protected free speech.

One antiabortion website (www.christianguallery.com/atrocities) provides access to the main "Nuremberg Files" archive, which lists "Abortionists—the baby butchers." When, last year, the American Medical Association became aware of the website, which targets 225 doctors and characterises them as either "working," "wounded," or "fatality," it formed a crisis team to alert doctors whose names were on

the site and met with officials from the Justice Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to protect doctors against domestic terrorists.

A photograph of Dr Warren Hern appears on the website next to severed limbs dripping blood; the caption reads: "Warren Hern currently preforms (sic) third trimester murder...the name of his facility is called Boulder Abortion Clinic." Dr Hern said his life had been turned into a nightmare by protesters, who have put his face on their "Deadly Dozen" flyer, which looks like a "wanted" poster, and alleges that he and other doctors are "Guilty of Crimes Against Humanity."

The National Abortion Federation, a pro-choice organisation, reported that there have been seven killings, 15 attempted murders, 154 arson incidents, and 39 bombings involving abortion clinics or workers in the past two decades. □