healthy eyes. This is the first known molecular marker for glaucoma and may lead to an early genetic screening test (*Nature Medicine* 2001;7:304-9).

Dr Joel Schuman and his colleagues at Tufts University School of Medicine in Boston have discovered that ELAM-1 is located on the cells that make up the eye's trabecular meshwork.

The trabecular meshwork forms part of the outflow pathway for aqueous humour as it drains from the back of the eye. If the outflow of aqueous humour is obstructed the intraocular pressure rises and glaucoma may occur.

They propose that abnormalities in the genes for ELAM-1 might be considered to be a diagnostic marker of glaucoma, before any rise in intraocular pressure is observed.

Abi Berger *BMJ*

More than a quarter of India's youngsters have premarital sex

A quarter to a third of India's young people indulge in premarital sex, a new study conducted by the National Institute of Health and Family Welfare and suppressed by India's health ministry, has said.

The study, coordinated by V K Tewari, surveyed premarital sexuality and unmet contraceptive needs among school and college students, young working men and women, and young people aged 15-24 years living in slums in Delhi and Lucknow. It concludes that premarital sex varies from 17% among schoolchildren to 33% among young workers in the typical north Indian population. Premarital sex was more common in Lucknow than in Delhi.

A majority of the 3300 respondents who had had premarital sex reported first having sex at age 16-18 years. The average age for first sex estimated by the researchers was 17.4 years for boys and 18.2 for girls. Sixty per cent of respondents said that they had sex rarely or sometimes; 14% had sex frequently.

About a third of the respondents were found lacking in awareness of unsafe sexual encounters.

Rohit Sharma *Mumbai*

Spanish doctors warn others off their territory

Spain's Organisation of Medical Colleges, which brings together most official medical colleges, has started a campaign to prevent pharmacists and, to a lesser extent, opticians, from encroaching on doctors' work.

OMC

Spain's new campaign poster

With the slogan "Your doctor, as ever. His unique interest is yours," the campaign was launched in Madrid by the health minister, Ms Celia Villalobos. It was originally conceived in 1999 to try to stop pharmacists and opticians taking on new tasks, particularly in the management of chronic diseases (*BMJ* 1999;318:1308).

Spain has an unemployment rate among doctors of almost 20%. The rate of doctors to the population is 3.9 per 1000, compared with 2.5 in France, 2.7 in Germany, and 1.7 in the United Kingdom.

Dr Ignacio Sánchez-Nicolay, the organisation's president, said that "the campaign's simple and sincere goal is to make people aware that doctors are the most suitably qualified professionals to diagnose, treat, and take the responsibility to follow up a disease."

Xavier Bosch *Barcelona*

Surfactant trial in Latin American infants criticised

Fred Charatan *Florida*

A new drug trial on infants in Latin America has been criticised as unethical because the control group of babies in the trial will be given a placebo rather than another, effective drug. Critics point out that it contravenes the newly revised Declaration of Helsinki, which states that new treatments should always be tested against the best current method, where that exists (*BMJ* 2000;321:913).

Discovery Laboratories of Doylestown, Pennsylvania, has planned a placebo controlled study in Latin America of sinapultide (Surfaxin), a new drug for treating the idiopathic respiratory distress syndrome in premature newborn infants.

Public Citizen, a Washington based, non-profit making, consumer watchdog, has written to Tommy Thompson, the new US health secretary, condemning the study design as "exploitative." The control group of 325 premature infants will be treated with placebo, instead of a life-saving surfactant drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Many infants given placebo are likely to die unnecessarily, an analysis by Public Citizen has shown.

In its letter to Mr Thompson, Public Citizen cited internal FDA documents showing that the administration was against placebo controlled trials of surfactants in the idiopathic respiratory distress syndrome. It also pointed out that the use of a placebo in the study violated the Declaration of Helsinki, which states: "The benefits, risks, burdens and effectiveness of a new method should be tested against those of the best current prophylactic, diagnostic and therapeutic methods."

Dr Robert Capetola, head of Discovery Laboratories, said that his company had made a large commitment to what was not only a South American study but an international one. The proposed study would have three arms: the new synthetic drug (sinapultide), another previously approved surfactant drug (beractant), and a placebo.

He said that the company will provide training, support, equipment, and also sinapultide—if proved effective—at a very low cost throughout the countries in which the study is conducted (one or more of Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Mexico) for 10 years.

JON SPAULL/PANOS PICTURES

Some premature babies will receive only a placebo

Alternative designs of the trial were rejected as likely to increase the length of the study by as much as two years, resulting in thousands of additional deaths and debilitating lung conditions among infants.

The FDA has not given the go-ahead for the sponsor's proposed Latin American trial and said that the complex issues that the trial raised were the reason it was discussed at a recent "scientific rounds" meeting.

The administration objects to placebo controlled trials of surfactants for the idiopathic respiratory distress syndrome in the United States because "we have available approved surfactants that are the standard of care."

Dr Sidney Wolfe, the director of Public Citizen's health research group, said: "The infants who would get placebos are being used by the company for reasons having to do with corporate bottom lines in order to get their drug approved."

Public Citizen is also asking the new Office of Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services to use its influence to stop the study immediately. □