

*In brief***Human Genetics Commission recommends freeze on use of test results:**

The Human Genetics Commission this week recommended to the government that there should be an immediate moratorium on the use of genetic test results by insurance companies for all classes of insurance, and that this should be backed by legislation.

Length of hospital stays fall in United States:

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has found that the average length of a hospital stay has declined radically in the United States over the past 20 years, from 7.3 days in 1980 to 5.0 days in 1999. Additionally, the rate of admissions to hospital has dropped nearly 30% in the same period, from 168 per 1000 population to 122.

Institute issues guidance on brain cancer drug:

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has recommended that the brain cancer drug temozolomide (Temodal) should be given to suitable patients whose brain tumours have recurred after initial treatment and who have not responded to chemotherapy.

Japan's health scheme is set to be in deficit:

One of Japan's largest state organised health insurance schemes is set to face an estimated deficit of £7.3bn (\$10.2bn) by 2002. The scheme, which until now has seen surpluses of £2.8-£5.6bn, is experiencing the effects of an ageing population and the high costs of health care, as well as the rising levels of health claims.

Hanging is most common suicide method in young men:

Hanging replaced self poisoning from car exhaust fumes as the most common cause of suicide in young men in England and Wales in the second half of the 1990s, a new study has shown. The study, by Dr Mike McClure of the Imperial College School of Medicine, London, showed that self poisoning by car fumes decreased with the introduction of catalytic converters (*British Journal of Psychiatry* 2001;178: 469-74).

GPs shut surgeries in protest at government targets

Zosia Kmietowicz *London*

GPs across the United Kingdom turned their backs on their surgeries on Tuesday in protest against working conditions and increasing demands imposed by government policies.

At least 1000 GPs are estimated to have taken part in the activities, which ranged from closing surgeries to dressing up and putting up posters to raise awareness of the crisis affecting general practice. In Avon all 40 GPs in Weston-Super-Mare closed their surgeries. Their actions were mirrored up and down the country, with many GPs arranging emergency cover for patients so that they could make their feelings about working conditions felt.

In London GPs gathered at the Department of Health to

petition the health secretary, Alan Milburn, directly about the rapid introduction of new government targets that they say cannot be achieved without a massive injection of cash and more family doctors.

Dr Cornel Fleming, a GP in north London and an executive member of the Small Practices Association, hired a locum for the day to join the protest at Westminster.

"I will be asking the health minister to come and talk to some of the grass roots GPs to see what conditions are really like. I had to work seven hours during my supposed weekend off to try catch up some paperwork, and I am still behind," he said.

Dr Fleming complained bit-

terly about the prospect of GPs being forced to sign personal medical service contracts with their local trust. "I always thought that Labour supported trade unions, but here we are being told that the BMA can no longer represent us," he said.

Although the BMA said that it understood GPs' complaints, it was unable to support the activities as it could be liable to prosecution under trade union laws.

Dr John Chisholm, chairman of the BMA's General Practitioners Committee, said: "I understand and share the concerns of general practitioners. Many of them are at breaking point because of their intolerable workload. It is important that the government listens to their concerns and takes urgent action to give patients the high quality service they deserve and which doctors want to provide—a service that protects patient health and safety, and the health of family doctors too." □

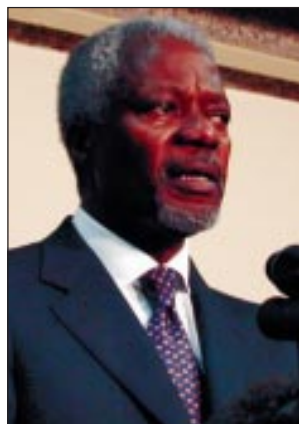
UN calls for \$10bn to wage war on AIDS

Annabel Ferriman *BMJ*

The United Nations' secretary general, Kofi Annan, has called for spending on AIDS to be increased 10-fold in developing countries. He wants a "war chest" of \$7bn-10bn (£5bn-7bn) to be spent annually on a global campaign against AIDS, a massive increase on the \$1bn a year that is currently spent.

Speaking at a meeting of the Organisation of African Unity in Abuja, Nigeria, Mr Annan issued a call to donors in the hope that firm commitments would be made to the fund by the time that the United Nations held its special session on HIV and AIDS at the end of June.

Although 25 million people are living with HIV in Africa—70% of the infected adults and children worldwide—only about 25 000 have access to antiretroviral treatment. The plight of Africa has caught the attention, and the conscience, of the world, the Secretary-General stated, and Africa is no longer being left to face the disaster of AIDS alone.



Kofi Annan called on leaders to break the silence on AIDS

Calling the battle against AIDS his "personal priority," Mr Annan outlined five priority areas for the campaign:

- Preventing further spread of the epidemic: large scale awareness campaigns are needed, as is access to voluntary counselling, testing, and, when appropriate, condoms. About a third of the 36 million people infected with HIV worldwide are aged 15-24
- Reducing HIV transmission from mother to child: mothers should be able to find out whether they are HIV positive and have access to short term antiretroviral treatment. About

600 000 children acquired HIV last year, the vast majority from vertical transmission

- Ensuring care and treatment is within reach of all: six of the world's leading pharmaceutical companies are now ready to sell drugs to developing countries at greatly reduced prices. Access to affordable drugs to treat HIV infection, however, is only part of the care package, which includes voluntary counselling and testing, home and community based care, and treatment for opportunistic infections

- Delivering scientific breakthroughs: more funding is needed for finding a cure and a vaccine for AIDS

- Protecting those made vulnerable by the epidemic, especially orphans: help should be provided for the 13 million children—most in sub-Saharan Africa—who have lost their mothers or both parents to AIDS.

Mr Annan called on the African leaders attending the summit to break the wall of silence and embarrassment surrounding the AIDS issue in many African societies, to remove the discrimination and stigma attached to those infected, and to mobilise more of their domestic budgets against the pandemic. □