

In brief

Listeriosis outbreak in US kills seven:

In the largest ever incident, 12.2m kg of precooked turkey and chicken have been recalled because of an outbreak of listeriosis in the northeastern United States. Forty six people have been admitted to hospital, with seven deaths and three miscarriages or stillbirths in pregnant women. Some meat was sent to schools for lunch programmes.

Carers still miss out on support:

A survey by Barclays plc and the Princess Royal Trust for Carers of 4000 carers in the United Kingdom shows that 1 in 4 carers had received no information about the diagnosis of the person they care for and half of those surveyed said they did not have enough information on side effects of medication given. This is despite the introduction of the national strategy for carers three years ago. See *Carers Speak Out* on www.carers.org

Public consultation on sex selection begins:

The UK Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority has begun a public consultation on the availability and regulation of sex selection techniques, at the request of the secretary of state for health, Alan Milburn. Copies of *Choice and Responsibility in Human Reproduction* are available from www.hfea.gov.uk

Stroke Association calls for more specialist units:

The Stroke Association presented a 50 000 signature petition to Downing Street calling for appropriate specialist care for people who have a stroke.

BMA wants health checks on asylum seekers:

Asylum seekers should have better access to health care, a report published this week by the BMA recommends. It says that the physical and mental health of all asylum seekers, including unaccompanied children, should be assessed on entry and appropriate treatment provided before they are dispersed to accommodation centres. *Asylum Seekers: Meeting Their Healthcare Needs* is at www.bma.org.uk

Research spending on cancers doesn't match their death rates

Zosia Kmietowicz *London*

Scientists in the United Kingdom believe that an innovative "map" of how money is spent on cancer research could help to streamline research on cancer, target areas of underfunding, and advance new discoveries in the field.

The National Cancer Research Institute has produced what is thought to be the world's first detailed breakdown of cancer research in any country. It estimates that funding of more than £250m (\$390m; €400m) from 15 leading charities and government organisations goes towards cancer research in the United Kingdom every year.

The analysis of some 1800 projects shows that most of the funding is channelled into the country's biggest killers from cancer: cancers of the breast, colon and rectum, and prostate. However, some cancers that cause few deaths attract a large share of the funding, while others that have a high death toll get little research attention.

This is especially true for lung cancer and leukaemia. Although lung cancer accounted for 22% of deaths from cancer in 2000, it received just 3% of available funding. Conversely, leukaemia, which accounted for 3% of deaths from cancer,

received 18% of the funding.

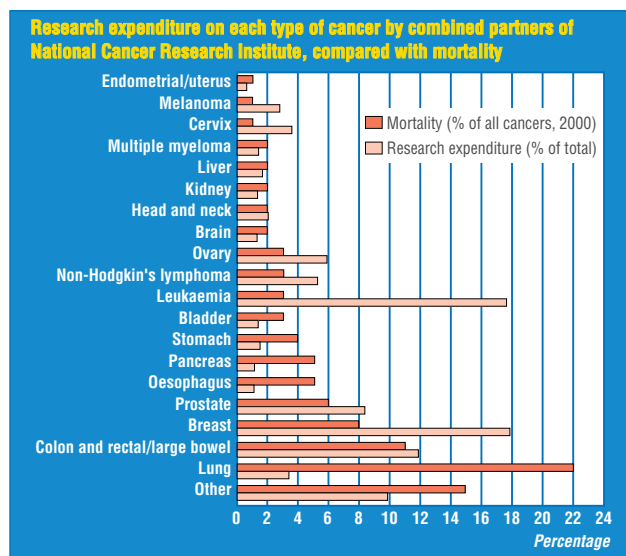
Dr Liam O'Toole, director of the institute, explained that these figures reflect in part the difficulty of research into lung cancer, which is often diagnosed late in very sick patients. By contrast research into leukaemia is much easier.

"At last we have a clear map of cancer research in the UK," said Dr O'Toole. "Armed with this we can see where we are at the moment, and we can start to

better plan where we want to get to in the future."

The map also shows that the biggest proportion of spending (41%) goes on basic biological research, the results of which can be applied to any cancer. The next largest share (22%) goes on research into treatment, while 16% is spent on research into prevention, care of patients, and survival attracts the least funding—a finding that has prompted the institute to set up special taskforce groups to see what further research might be possible in these areas. □

A database of UK cancer research is planned for next year. For more information see www.ncri.org.uk



Testing of drugs on children ruled unlawful by US judge

Scott Gottlieb *New York*

A US federal judge has overruled the Food and Drug Administration's requirement that drug companies test some of their products on children, saying the agency had overstepped its authority in requiring companies to do so.

The rule, promulgated by the FDA in 1998, has been generally accepted by the pharmaceutical industry, and the number of drugs tested for use by children

has been rising. The rule has been considered a major success by the FDA and public health advocates in helping increase the number of drugs available for routine use in children.

The FDA said it was "very disappointed" by the decision. "We still think it is vitally important that drugs be studied in children so that their safety and efficacy can be determined on the basis of sound data," said FDA spokesman Lawrence Bachorik. He said the agency is "weighing its options" on how to proceed.

Before the FDA rule was implemented, most drugs were approved after being tested only in adults. Doctors prescribing of drugs for children would be based on their own medical experience. Congress passed

legislation in 1997 that encouraged drug companies to test their drugs on children.

But several groups, including the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a public policy group in Washington, DC, and the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons, sued the FDA to overturn the rule. They argued that it improperly expanded the agency's authority because it went beyond the original legislation by compelling companies to conduct tests on children and opened the door to greater regulation of off label uses of drugs, which are widespread in medicine.

In the court decision district judge Henry Kennedy Jr, of the federal court for the District of Columbia, agreed with their argument. □