

## Plans for foundation trusts could spark pay spiral

Wendy Moore *London*

A prominent NHS chairman who heads a large London trust has warned MPs that government plans to set up foundation trusts could destabilise the capital's health service and lead to the poaching of staff from trusts that pay less.

Peter Dixon, chairman of University College London Hospitals NHS Trust, told members of the Commons health select committee last week that the trust had agreed to apply for foundation status despite "considerable reservations" over the idea.

The health select committee is conducting an inquiry into the government's proposals to create foundation trusts, which will be freed from Whitehall control and given freedom to vary staff pay and raise capital. The government intends to establish the first tranche of 12 foundation trusts in April.

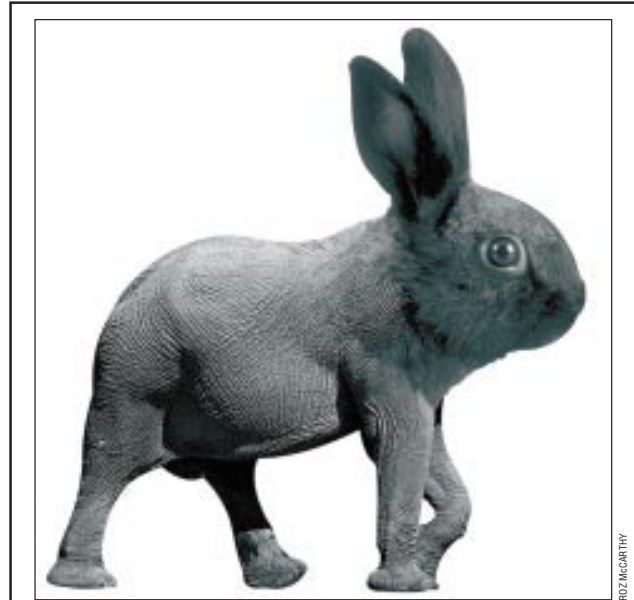
Mr Dixon, who also chairs the partnerships and health policy committee of the NHS Confederation, said the trust's board saw "potential" advantages in the scheme. But the board feared

that the new governance arrangements for foundation trusts—which will allow local staff and local people to elect representatives to boards of governors—could damage large teaching hospitals. "I could be replaced by the man in the monkey suit," he warned MPs.

He said board members were also worried that proposed new powers allowing foundation trusts to vary wages could lead them to poach staff from non-foundation trusts and spark a pay spiral. He said: "I do think we need to have measures in place to make sure the more successful hospitals can't poach staff by paying them more money." Foundation trusts might also attract more patients, leading to survival problems for other trusts. He said London primary care trusts were afraid that foundation trusts would become "a rogue elephant in their midst."

In written evidence Mr Dixon warned that the new governance plans could lead to "entry-ism," where certain interest groups become sufficiently organised to exercise "inappropriate influence" that might not benefit local people and could affect teaching and research.

However, other managers giving evidence to the committee supported the foundation trust plans and hoped the plans would be extended to cover primary care and mental health trusts. □



*Wellcome Trust announces new award scheme*

This hybrid animal—part elephant, part rabbit—is an image from a series of short films, called *Eye-See*, which won a "science on stage and screen" award from the research charity the Wellcome Trust last year.

The films, made by Rosetta Pictures and APT Films, aim to show people with normal vision how the world looks to someone with visual agnosia. Now the Wellcome Trust has announced a new £1m award scheme to support and encourage innovative arts projects that investigate biomedical science.

The trust is inviting applications for a round of research awards of up to £15 000 (\$24 400; €22 600), to support the development of ideas in their formative stages, and a series of production awards (in the region of £100 000) for substantial projects.

Annabel Ferriman *BMJ*

More information is available at [www.sciart.org](http://www.sciart.org)

## Threat of war is affecting mental health of Iraqi children, says report

Jocalyn Clark *BMJ*

The vast majority of Iraq's 13 million children will be affected if the war between Iraq and the West goes ahead, a report released by a Canadian led team of health experts concludes.

The report, based on a humanitarian fact finding mission in Iraq that included interviews with 100 families in Baghdad, Karbala, and Basra in January 2003, warns that Iraqi children are at grave risk of starvation, disease, death, and psychological trauma.

Casualties are predicted to be in the tens of thousands in the event of war. Referring to the decline in health and nutritional

status during 12 years of economic sanctions after the Gulf war, Dr Samantha Nutt, the team's public health expert, said, "Iraqi children are more vulnerable than ever."

Two child psychologists who accompanied the team interviewed more than 300 children to assess their mental health. They found that the children have "a great fear" of a war they perceive to be "hanging over their heads." Children as young as four described clear ideas about the horrors of war. They are fearful, anxious, and depressed about the prospect of armed conflict, the report says. Many have night-

mares, and 40% do not think that life is worth living.

The report was written by members of the International Study Team, a group of Canadian and international experts on health, food security, the psychological impact of war on children, and disaster preparedness. The team, which received funding from 20 Canadian charities and non-governmental organisations, conducted the study without the support of the Iraqi government. The mission was led by Dr Eric Hoskins, who coordinated a similar assessment with the US based Harvard Study Team after the 1991 Gulf war; this assessment was acknowledged at the time to be the most comprehensive study of the impact of war on civilians.

The report coincides with the release of a public statement by international health professional

associations that emphasises the catastrophic effects of war on civilians, especially women and children. The World Medical Association, representing eight million doctors from 70 countries, has joined with the International Council of Nurses, the World Dental Federation, the International Confederation of Midwives, and the World Confederation for Physical Therapy in condemning all armed conflict.

These reports support the work of other international health organisations highlighting the dire consequences of war on the Iraqi people (16 November, p 1134; 25 January, p 184). □

*Our Common Responsibility: The Impact of a New War on Iraqi Children* can be found at the website of War Child Canada, <http://warchild.ca>