

received a grant from the MRC. He had also been supervising career training awards from the council.

A spokeswoman for the council said: "The lead responsibility for the cooperative group has been assumed pro tem by another one of its members. We have agreed with them that the supervision of Professor Shorvon's clinical research will be carried out by a senior clinical researcher whilst the General Medical Council enquiry is under way." Professor Richard Frackowiak, vice provost of UCL, has taken his place.

The General Medical Council has confirmed that it is looking into the allegations made against Professor Shorvon. If, however, it finds evidence of wrongdoing, the GMC's professional conduct committee could proceed with a hearing only after receiving a complaint from Singapore, which to date has not been forthcoming.

Owen Dyer *London*

Privy Council overturns GMC's erasure of psychiatrist

A psychiatrist specialising in the treatment of drug misusers who was struck off by the General Medical Council for leaving blank prescriptions for a nurse and failing to supervise addiction clinics properly has had his erasure from the medical register quashed on appeal.

The judicial committee of the Privy Council last week ruled that the GMC's decision to strike Enrique Mateu-Lopez off the register in November 2002 was "excessive and disproportionate."

Giving judgment, Sir Philip Otton said it was evident that Dr Mateu had been placed under considerable pressures and had asked for help. "It was not forthcoming, and he had pressed on as best he could." Dr Mateu, who qualified in Spain in 1961 and trained as a psychiatrist in England, was running addiction clinics at St George's, Stafford, and associated clinics elsewhere from 1998 to 2000 when, according to

the GMC charges, he failed to adequately supervise the running of the clinics.

Dr Mateu, who had been described by one witness as a workaholic, explained that if he had not left blank, signed prescription forms when he went away clinics would have had to be cancelled. Existing patients receiving methadone treatment would have reverted to illegal street heroin, and new patients would have been denied the opportunity to stop taking heroin.

Clare Dyer *legal correspondent, BMJ*

American Medical Association approves stem cell research

Doctors' participation in cloning stem cells for research and treatment—but not for making babies—is consistent with medical ethics and was approved by the American Medical Association's House of Delegates at its annual meeting in Chicago last week.

Dr Michael Goldrich, chairman elect of the association's council on ethical and judicial affairs, claimed that there was no conflict between the recommendations and the Bush administration's opposition to all research involving cloning. He said that President Bush's stance related to federal funding for stem cell research, whereas the association's report "gives guidance to physicians."

The new recommendations say that it might become possible to use stem cells to replace diseased or damaged tissue or to deliver genes or proteins in gene therapy. "The ability to isolate human embryonic stem cells has rekindled expectations that these cells will play a major role in regenerative medicine," said the association's press release.

The council has been considering stem cell cloning for three years. It supports the present moratorium on human cloning. Janice Hopkins Tanne *New York*

A summary is posted on the news section of the association's website (www.ama-assn.org).

Annual deaths from mesothelioma in Britain to reach 2000 by 2010

Caroline White *London*

The death toll from mesothelioma in Britain could reach 2000 a year by the year 2010, a leading UK epidemiologist said last week.

Professor Julian Peto, of the Institute of Cancer Research and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, was speaking at an international conference in London to raise awareness of mesothelioma, the incurable cancer that is mainly caused by breathing in asbestos fibres.

Professor Peto said that in Britain the annual number of deaths from the disease had now reached 1700, up from less than 200 in the 1960s. But the numbers would continue to rise, peaking at 2000 a year by 2010, a figure lower than previously thought, but still substantial.

Dr Maurice Slevin, chairman of CancerBACUP, the charity that organised the conference, said, "Twice as many people will die of this disease every year as from cervical cancer. It is very difficult to diagnose and treat, and most people, including doctors, know very little about it."

Dr Martin Muers, consultant in respiratory medicine at Leeds General Infirmary, added that doctors often misdiagnosed the characteristic symptoms of breathlessness, chest pain, and tiny amounts of pleural fluid.

In response to the need for information—last year CancerBACUP's information line received 300 enquiries about the disease—the charity has produced a booklet, *Understanding Mesothelioma*.

The number of diagnoses in people below the age of 50 in the United Kingdom has been steadily falling since 1990 as a result of efforts since the late 1970s to remove environmental asbestos and tighten controls on its use and disposal.

But the incidence of the disease is still rising in people aged over 60. It can take more than 50 years for symptoms to develop, and as yet no effective screening method for the disease is available.

Most people are dead within 18 months of their diagnosis and experience "awful" symptoms. So far 50 000 people in Britain have died of mesothelioma, most of them labourers, builders, and dockers. Before the 1980s asbestos was widely used in the manufacture of household appliances, brakes, and clutches, as well as in buildings.

Last year the House of Lords overturned a ruling that had denied compensation to people with mesothelioma and their spouses on the grounds that more than one employer was likely to have been responsible. □

