

# bmj.com news roundup

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## Drug company targets US state health officials

A major pharmaceutical company has sought to influence state government officials with trips, perks, lavish meals, and other payments, says an investigator from the Pennsylvania Office of Inspector General.

Investigator Allen Jones told the *BMJ* earlier this week that he had discovered that the drug company Janssen was sponsoring educational events for state employees, funding individuals' travel arrangements, and paying honorariums of up to \$2000 (£1100; €1610) each to key officials who held influence over the drugs prescribed in state-run prisons and mental hospitals. Janssen markets risperidone, which is widely used in the treatment of schizophrenia.

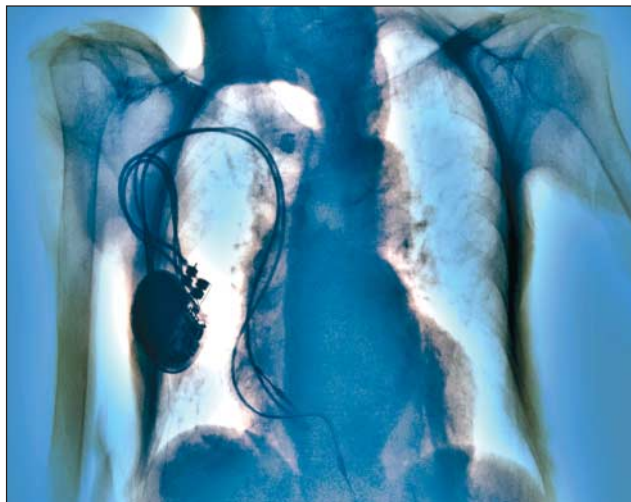
Yet as his investigations widened, Mr Jones was dropped from the case and told by a manager that "drug companies write cheques to politicians" on both sides of politics. Mr Jones subsequently started legal action, accusing his employer of trying to bury important evidence of wrongdoing. Although no formal report has been released, many of his findings were reported in the *New York Times* last Sunday (p BU1).

A spokesman for Janssen, Doug Arbesfeld, confirmed to the *BMJ* that the company had made payments to state officials and helped to sponsor the guidelines, but he flatly rejected claims that the company was seeking influence.

Ray Moynihan *Washington*

## Israeli team develops new method of in vitro fertilisation

An Israeli team of male infertility experts have developed a new step in the reproductive medical technique of intracytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) that they say improves the method's pregnancy rate and the "take home baby" rate.



## *BMJ sponsors photography award for medical image*

The *BMJ* is sponsoring a photography award, Medicine and Life, part of this year's Novartis and Daily Telegraph Visions of Science Photographic Awards. The winner will receive £500 (\$900; €730) and wide exposure of their image.

The judges will be seeking an image that creatively illustrates disease, diagnostic techniques, and current treatments to a wider audience. It may show something never seen before, explain a phenomenon from the medical world, show how medicine or an illness can affect lives, illustrate scientific data, or simply show the beauty of science in medicine. The picture above—an x ray film of an implanted pacemaker—is an example of the type of image judges are seeking.

Other categories in the Science Photographic Awards are action, people, concept, and art. Photos must have been taken on or after 1 January 2000 and the closing date is 7 May 2004.

Lynn Eaton *London*

For further information visit [www.visions-of-science.co.uk](http://www.visions-of-science.co.uk) or call 020 7613 5577.

Professor Benjamin Bartoov, a biochemist and andrologist at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan, developed the new method, which is known as intracytoplasmic morphologically selected sperm injection (IMSI).

When ICSI is used in the routine way, one sperm is taken from the sperm pool after routine selection under a regular microscope that magnifies it 200 to 400 times. Professor Bartoov uses a high magnification method, which multiplies the image of individual sperm up to 6000 times through high power light microscopy. This makes it possible to discard sperm whose nuclei have an abnormal shape or contents and which are less likely to produce a healthy embryo.

An article on the method and

its results was published last year by Professor Bartoov and eight colleagues from Bar-Ilan University and the Herzliya Medical Centre in *Fertility and Sterility* (2003;80:1413-9).

Judy Siegel-Itzkovich *Jerusalem*

## Research bodies disappointed by decision to cancel primate research laboratory

Research organisations in the United Kingdom expressed concern about the future of neuroscience research requiring primate experimentation after the University of Cambridge

announced last week that it had decided not to proceed with plans for a neuroscience research centre.

The University of Cambridge said that it would not continue with plans for a primate research centre because protests by animal rights campaigners had increased the costs of maintaining security.

Professor Colin Blakemore, chief executive of the Medical Research Council, said: "We must make sure that pressure and threats from a tiny minority of protestors do not impede research that is vital in the hunt for treatments and cures for terrible illnesses."

Professor Blakemore suggested that plans to build a centre just for primate research might not have been the best approach, as it was bound to become a target for protestors. "Research centres should be designed to answer scientific questions. Primate research is a small, but essential, component of research that people turn to only when there is no other way to answer a particular question," he explained, suggesting that primate research should ideally be carried out alongside other methods of scientific inquiry.

Susan Mayor *London*

## Traditional rulers in northern Nigeria call for halt to polio vaccination

The controversy over the administration of poliomyelitis vaccines in northern Nigeria has taken a new turn as traditional rulers from the region have asked the Nigerian government to stop administering the vaccine because of fears that it is contaminated.

Speaking under the aegis of Jama'atul Nasril Islam (JNI), the umbrella organisation of Muslims in northern Nigeria, the rulers said their advice is based on the report of a medical team sent to India by the Muslim organisation to test the vaccines. The report is said to confirm the fears of the Muslims of northern Nigeria that the vaccines may be unsafe.