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Hospital apologises for remarks following IVF mix-up

A consultant gynaecologist whose in vitro fertilisation unit was closed after an embryo mix-up accepted a six figure libel settlement last week over comments made by her trust's medical director about her management of the unit.

St George's Healthcare NHS Trust in south London apologised to Geeta Nargund in a statement read out at the High Court in London and agreed to pay her a substantial five figure sum in damages and costs of more than £100 000 (\$167 000; €144 000).

Mrs Nargund, 43, was medical director of the Diana Princess of Wales Centre for Reproductive Medicine until October 2002, when she was suspended on full pay and the unit was closed. The closure followed a three way mix-up in April 2002, when the embryos of one woman were implanted in another, and hers in turn were implanted in a third woman.

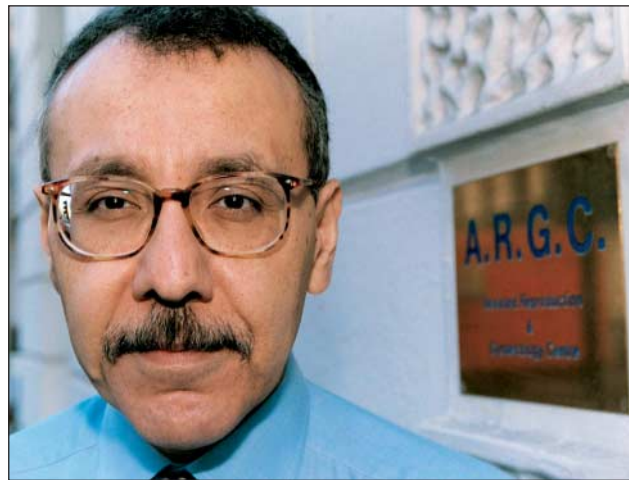
The error, made by a doctor and an embryologist, happened when Mrs Nargund was away from the unit. It was discovered within 24 hours, and the embryos were flushed out.

Her libel claim centred on comments by the trust's medical director, Paul Jones, who told television news programmes and several newspapers that the unit was "chaotic" and "badly organised." The court was told that Professor Jones had never intended to suggest that Mrs Nargund was responsible for the mix-up or the suspension of the unit's services.

Clare Dyer legal correspondent, *BMJ*

Groups fight to stop doctors working without registration

British medical organisations will continue their fight against new European Union legislation that they believe poses a danger to



JULIAN MAREY/REX FEATURES

"Saviour sibling" is born after embryo selection in the United States

The birth of what has been described as Britain's first saviour sibling has renewed pressure on UK authorities to allow selection of embryos on the basis that they may help save the life of an already born brother or sister.

The birth of Jamie Whitaker at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital has reignited the ethical debate over whether it is right to select an embryo that is compatible with an older, sick sibling and to use its cord blood as a reservoir of stem cells for the sick child.

Jamie's brother, Charlie, aged 4, has Diamond-Blackfan anaemia, and the only hope of successful treatment is a transplantation of stem cells from the cord blood of a perfect tissue match or a bone marrow transplantation from a matched donor.

The parents, Michelle and Jayson Whitaker, who were treated in England by Dr Mohammed Taranissi (above), sought permission for the procedure from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority but were denied it. They then went to the Chicago Reproductive Genetics Institute, where two embryos were selected to provide a match for Charlie.

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*

patients, despite losing the first battle in their campaign.

Under the proposal now being examined by the European parliament healthcare professionals from any EU country would be able to work for up to four months a year, every year, in another member state without being registered with the host country's regulator.

The BMA, the General Medical Council, and the Royal College of Physicians are opposed to the move, which they fear would prevent them from acting against a doctor if there were a problem with the care a patient received.

Stefano Zappala, the Italian Christian Democrat MEP who is steering the draft legislation through the European parliament, took these concerns on

board and proposed excluding the "sectoral professions," which include doctors and other health professionals, from the new measures. However, last week he failed to persuade his fellow members on the parliament's legal affairs committee and lost the crucial decision by 18 votes to 12.

Rory Watson *Brussels*

Ruling on long term care prompts 50% rise in complaints

The number of complaints made against NHS trusts in England increased by 50% in the year to March 2003, and the increase

was mainly due to complaints about continuing care.

The health service ombudsman's annual report notes that the number of complaints made against NHS bodies in 2002-3 was 3994, compared to 2660 complaints in the previous year. The increase was almost entirely due to a large number of new complaints about continuing care, after a ruling by the health service ombudsman that some patients and their families had been wrongly forced to pay for care. The ruling was made in a special report, *NHS Funding for Long Term Care*, in February (1 March, p 466).

It recommended that local NHS bodies review the criteria they use to assess funding for long term care and try to identify any patients who may have been disadvantaged by unfair criteria.

The ombudsman, Ann Abraham, said: "In the six weeks after my report was published I received more than 1300 new complaints about long term care."

Susan Mayor *London*

The Health Service Ombudsman for England Annual Report 2002-03 can be purchased from the Stationery Office.

Professor is replaced as lead scientist while GMC investigates his research

The British neurologist Simon Shorvon, who was dismissed three months ago as director of Singapore's National Neuroscience Institute, has been temporarily replaced as the lead scientist responsible for using a Medical Research Council grant to University College London (UCL).

Professor Shorvon left Singapore immediately after being found by his employer, the National Healthcare Group, to have breached ethical guidelines in his research there (19 April, p 839).

He returned to his former post at UCL's Institute of Neurology, where he was overseeing a cooperative group that