

# bmj.com news roundup

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## Doctors object to patients' access to notes

The Australian Medical Association is fighting plans by the federal privacy commissioner to make doctors surrender all their medical records to patients who demand them within 30 days and at no cost.

The association wants some parts of the notes to remain beyond the scope of the draft guidelines for the new privacy laws, claiming that they are the doctors' intellectual property and if viewed independently could cause anxiety.

The association's president, Dr Kerry Phelps, said there were two levels of medical records, and she had no problem with doctors handing over the first, which contained results, history, and information that a patient gives a doctor.

"On the other level are medical records that are the doctors' intellectual property—the doctors' private thoughts, their thinking as they go through formulating a diagnosis and a management plan," she said. "That is a level which is not always beneficial for patients to know."

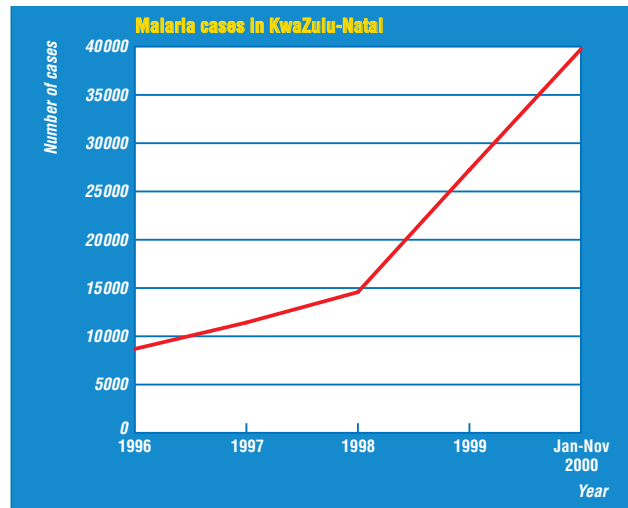
Christopher Zinn *Sydney*

## Cholesterol guidelines will triple numbers taking drugs

The US National Institutes of Health, through its national cholesterol education programme, has issued sweeping new clinical practice and management guidelines designed to lower cholesterol levels.

The guidelines call for more aggressive diagnosis and treatment of hypercholesterolaemia and for a change from the acceptable, healthy level of high density lipoprotein from a minimum of 35 mg/dl (0.91 mmol/l) to 40 mg/dl (1.03 mmol/l). They also endorse the wider use of lipid lowering drugs and lifestyle changes.

The new guidelines will sub-



## Attempts to ban DDT have increased deaths

Pressures on poor countries to ban the insecticide DDT because of fears that its use would harm the environment have led to a resurgence of malaria in the world, yet the environmental impact of its use are "negligible," a study published this week has said.

The study shows that after malaria was eradicated in wealthy countries and DDT was banned in those places, poor countries were pressured by health and donor agencies and environmental groups to stop using DDT spraying programmes. The agencies feared that they would harm the environment and adversely affect human health.

But these fears were unsubstantiated, the study's authors believe. "No scientific peer reviewed study has ever replicated any case of negative human health impacts from DDT," said Dr Roger Bate, media and development director for the International Policy Network and joint author of the study with Richard Tren, director of economic policy at the non-governmental organisation Africa Fighting Malaria.

A surge in malaria in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa coincided with the withdrawal of DDT from malaria control programmes in 1996. Synthetic pyrethroids were used in its place. But some mosquitoes, most notably the *Anopheles funestus*, which is a highly efficient vector of the disease, had developed resistance to these chemicals, and when it returned to South Africa in the second half of the 1990s, malaria rates began to increase.

Annabel Ferriman *BMJ*

*Malaria and the DDT Story* is published by the Institute of Economic Affairs (details at [www.iea.org.uk](http://www.iea.org.uk)).

stantially increase the number of Americans considered to be at risk of heart disease and expand the number who will receive dietary and drug treatment. The number of Americans who receive cholesterol lowering drugs is expected to increase to an estimated 36 million (about 18% of American adults) from the 13 million who now take them, if the guidelines are correctly followed.

Deborah Josefson *San Francisco*

## Row over Nottingham tobacco cash deepens

The decision by Nottingham University to accept a £3.8m (\$5.3m) donation from British American Tobacco has led directly to the loss of cancer research funding and prestigious research staff from the university.

The money, which is to be used to fund an international centre for corporate responsibility, has sparked a furore among antismoking campaigners.

Last week the *BMJ's* editor, Richard Smith, resigned from his part time post as professor of medical journalism at Nottingham after the result of a readers' vote on the journal's website.

The Cancer Research Campaign has decided that £1.5m—which was to be raised through an appeal to help build new research facilities in Nottingham—will now be donated to Newcastle University instead.

The university has also lost a team of cancer researchers led by Professor David Thurston, who has resigned from his post as professor of experimental cancer chemotherapy and director of the Gene Targeted Drug Design Research Group.

Mark Hunter *Leeds*

## US drug firms resist over the counter sales

An advisory panel of the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has voted overwhelmingly that three allergy remedies—loratadine, cetirizine, and fexofenadine—are safe enough to be bought at pharmacies and supermarkets without a doctor's prescription. But the manufacturers of the drugs, marketed in the United States as Claritin, Zyrtec, and Allegra, are resisting the idea.

Wellpoint Health Networks, a large Californian insurer, successfully argued before the FDA panel that all three drugs are safer than many of the other allergy drugs that are already sold over the counter.

Dr John Jenkins, director of the FDA office that evaluates anti-allergy drugs, said: "We have not identified any serious safety concerns with any of these drugs."

But the makers of the drugs argue that Wellpoint is trying to save money by shifting the cost from insurers to patients. Wellpoint has said that it would save \$45m (£32m) a year if the drugs were available over the counter.

Fred Charatan *Florida*