

## In brief

**New breast cancer gene is discovered:** Women with a faulty version of the BRIP1 gene have a higher risk of developing breast cancer, says a study published in *Nature Genetics* ([www.nature.com/ng](http://www.nature.com/ng), doi: 10.1038/ng1902). Carrying a faulty BRIP1 gene doubles the risk of having the disease by the age of 70 from one in 12 to around one in six.

**France announces public smoking ban:** The French prime minister, Dominique de Villepin, has announced a ban on smoking in enclosed public places such as bus and train stations, schools, and offices, to start on 1 February 2007. But bars, cafés, restaurants, clubs, and hotels have until 1 January 2008 to comply.

**Top Iraqi surgeon is murdered:** One of Iraq's most distinguished academic surgeons, Safaa Hamedi, director of the Najaf Teaching Hospital, was shot dead outside his home by three masked gunmen last week. The killers' motive is unknown. Dr Safaa had recently co-operated with the US army in installing cardiac monitors in the hospital.

**Alternative healing case fails:** A high profile prosecution of three alternative healers, a salt therapist, and a spiritual medium who were involved in treating the Dutch actor Sylvia Millecam, who died from breast cancer in 2001 (*BMJ* 2006;332:929), has been dropped because of insufficient evidence that their treatment damaged Ms Millecam's health. The Dutch Medical Association said that although doctors who practise alternative treatments must adhere to medical standards people who are not doctors "can do what they want."

**BMJ appoints GP editor:** Domhnall MacAuley, a GP, professor at the University of Ulster, and specialist in sport and exercise medicine, is the new clinical editor for primary care at the *BMJ*. He will deal with research and strategic planning for the journal's coverage of primary care. An associate editor at the *BMJ* since 2000, he was previously editor of the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.

## Dutch clinic is ordered to stop giving stem cell therapy

Tony Sheldon *Utrecht*

A Dutch healthcare watchdog has ordered a clinic in Rotterdam to stop giving patients a treatment in which patients are injected with stem cells taken from umbilical cord blood. The clinic claims that the injection of stem cells can "target cells in a manner specific to an individual's condition."

A four month investigation into the Preventive Medicine Clinic by the Dutch Healthcare Inspectorate has concluded that the clinic is not providing "responsible care," as it is "unable to demonstrate the origin, suitability, and safety of its stem cells" ([www.igz.nl](http://www.igz.nl)).

The inspectorate believes that this "jeopardises the health and safety of patients," who could be at risk of being infected with HIV or Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease or might have acute allergic reactions or rejection reactions or develop malignant tumours.

Many British patients have sought treatment at the clinic. Days before the inspectorate's decision a British patient was temporarily admitted to a local hospital with a "serious acute allergic reaction" after stem cell treatment at the clinic.



The clinic's director, Dr Robert Trossel, has six weeks to object to the inspectorate's decision

The inspectorate's investigation was sparked by complaints by Dutch neurologists about the clinic's unproved stem cell treatment for conditions such as multiple sclerosis and spinal cord injuries (*BMJ* 2006;332:1232).

Under Dutch law the clinic is obliged to offer responsible care, which means providing documentation covering the entire supply chain of stem cells from donor to recipient.

In June the inspectorate's investigators found a vial of stem cells that they were told was supplied by "ACT," a firm called Advanced Cell Therapeutics. But there was no charge number or certificate of analysis.

In September a report on BBC television's Newsnight programme alleged that stem cells supplied by Advanced Cell Therapeutics were "not intended for use in humans."

The clinic then voluntarily stopped using the company's stem cells. It then sought stem cells from a laboratory in Pakistan, but the documentation supplied did not show if the laboratory held a licence "to store and work on human umbilical cord blood for the purpose of administering it to patients."

The inspectorate concluded that there was insufficient certainty about the "origin, suitability, and safety" of the stem cells. The acting inspector general, Nico Oudendijk, said that the clinic seemed to be carrying out far reaching experimental treatments whose effectiveness was uncertain.

Robert Trossel, the clinic's medical director, claims to have treated hundreds of patients, charging about £12 500 (€18 000; \$23 400) each. Last week he was reported as saying that the stem cells he uses are safe.

Dr Trossel has six weeks in which to lodge an objection to the inspectorate's decision. ▶

## UN questions China over organ harvesting

John Zarocostas *Geneva*

Manfred Nowak, a human rights lawyer and the United Nations independent expert on torture, has asked China to respond to allegations of harvesting organs from dead prisoners.

The move comes after Mr Nowak received "quite a number" of allegations of the practice from human rights groups and members of the European parliament, among others.

Mr Nowak said that he has had oral confirmation from China that it is looking into the

situation. He expects written comments from investigators later this month.

Mr Nowak made a similar written request in late July or early August. However, Beijing failed to provide the information by the time he presented a report on his visit to China to the UN Human Rights Council in the second half of September.

La Yifan, a senior Chinese diplomat, told a session of the council, which has 47 member nations, that China would investigate the allegations seriously and that it would respond to the communications in a timely manner.

Meanwhile, after a BBC report about the sale of organs from executed prisoners, Qin Gang, a spokesman for China's foreign ministry, said on 28 September, "In China the use of bodies and organs of executed

prisoners is very prudent, with relevant regulations being strictly implemented."

One of the terms, he said, is that "the written consent of the prisoner to be executed must be obtained."

Experts do not believe that any prisoners are free of undue influence or pressure.

Amnesty International said that in 2005 China executed at least 1770 people; it believes the true figure to be much higher.

The BBC report put the price of a liver from an executed prisoner at £50 000 (€74 000; \$93 000). A report published in July by the Canadian human rights activists David Matas and David Kilgour said that the prices for organs in China were \$62 000 for a kidney, \$98 000 to \$130 000 for a liver, \$150 000 to \$170 000 for a lung, and \$30 000 for a cornea. ▶