

## In brief

**US government promises to fast-track AIDS drugs:** US health and human services secretary Tommy Thompson said this week the Food and Drug Administration would give rapid approval to new ready-made, single dose cocktails for AIDS for use in developing countries, including "pirated" copies of AIDS drugs.

**Delayed discharge figures fall:** The number of elderly people forced to wait in hospital in the United Kingdom while non-medical care arrangements are put in place for them is dropping, according to the health department. In October 2001 the number of people in hospital unnecessarily was 7065, but that went down to 2900 by March 2004. Since January 2004 local authorities have had to reimburse the NHS £100 (\$177; €147) a day (£120 in London) if their actions result in delayed discharge.

**GMC suspends doctor:** A doctor who was jailed for manslaughter after mistakenly ordering a cytotoxic drug to be injected into the spine of a teenage leukaemia patient was suspended for 12 months last week by the General Medical Council. Fedra Mulhem, a specialist registrar when the incident happened, had been jailed for eight months for Wayne Jowett's manslaughter.

**Group immunity in Netherlands drops below safe level:** The Dutch Health Inspectorate has warned of the possibility of large scale epidemics of polio or measles as a result of a decline in rates of infant vaccination since 1995. The latest figures show an overall drop of 1% (to 95%) in vaccinations against measles, mumps, and rubella and diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, and polio.

**Doctor cleared of manslaughter:** A consultant anaesthetist accused of the manslaughter of a 6 week old boy was cleared by a jury this week. Robert Falconer, aged 45, from Swansea, injected air directly into the bloodstream of Aaron Havard, but the jury unanimously found that the error did not amount to gross negligence.

## UK's "ethical recruitment policy" needs to be strengthened

Daloni Carlisle *London*

The Department of Health's code of conduct on overseas recruitment must be strengthened if Britain is to shrug off its international "bad guy" image, the author of a new report said last week.

Research by Professor James Buchan, Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh, for the Department for International Development, shows a substantial increase in international recruitment to the NHS in recent years, with half of new registrants on the General Medical Council now from countries outside the European Union.

The United Kingdom now has 10 000 more registered nurses

than in 1998, and Professor Buchan's analysis shows that this increase is due almost entirely to overseas recruitment.

But in 2002-3 one in four new nurse registrants were from the "proscribed" list of countries—those listed in the Department of Health's Code of Conduct on International Recruitment as not to be targeted by the NHS for active recruitment.

Internationally, the United Kingdom is by far the most active country recruiting from developing nations, with India and the Philippines providing the greatest number of nurses and doctors.

Professor Buchan told a seminar organised by the Department of Health and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to discuss his findings: "It is evident that we are recruiting from developing countries to a larger extent than several comparators. Internationally, the UK is seen as the bad guy draining healthcare workers from developing countries."

The department's code of conduct was issued in 2001 to the NHS in England to govern overseas recruitment and stop unethical recruitment from developing countries.

Professor Buchan said the code had made a "positive impact"—but only in the NHS in England. It did not apply to the private sector or the rest of the NHS.

"Much of the high profile and dodgy practice has been in the private sector," he said. "That is the sector that is giving the UK a bad name internationally. The question is whether something should be done about it."

He called for a strengthening of the code and for stronger policy interventions to manage the flow of healthcare workers and minimise damage to donor countries' health systems. □

*International Recruitment of Health Workers to the UK* is available at [www.dfidhealthrc.org/Shared/publications/reports/int\\_rec/int-rec-main.pdf](http://www.dfidhealthrc.org/Shared/publications/reports/int_rec/int-rec-main.pdf)

## Report warns of continuing violations of code on breast milk substitute marketing

Susan Mayor *London*

Many manufacturers of breast milk substitutes continue to violate an international code on marketing, a new report published last week says.

The report analysed the promotional practices of 16 international baby food companies and 14 bottle and teat companies between January 2002 and April 2004. It was published by the International Baby Food Action Network, a coalition of public interest groups working to reduce infant morbidity and mortality, as part of its ongoing monitoring of compliance with the international code of marketing of breast milk substitutes and relevant resolutions of the World Health Assembly.

Results showed a growing emphasis on "closeness to breast milk" in advertising materials: manufacturers attribute this closeness to the addition of fatty acids derived from fungi, algae, or fish oil, with claims linking them to increased intelligence.

The report also found that health facilities remained the preferred way for companies to reach mothers, with donations of formula and free samples to hospitals, especially in countries that had not yet implemented the code or where enforcement measures were inadequate. Gifts from companies to healthcare workers and women remained common, particularly in Thailand.

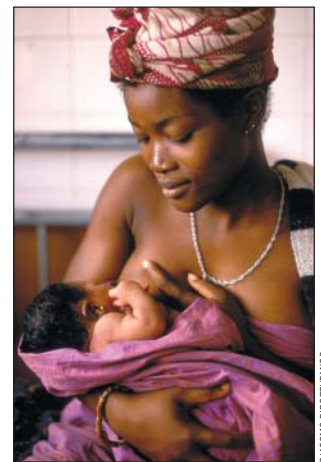
Annelies Allain, director of the International Baby Food Action Network's International Code Documentation Centre, based in Penang, Malaysia, said: "We found an increasing problem, with 11 out of the 16 companies studied adding fatty acids to their products and some claiming that this made them closer to breast milk and that they could improve intelligence.

"Mothers are taken in by this, and many are willing to pay the extra \$15 [£8; €12] to \$20 per tin that companies charge for these products."

The report found that the Switzerland based company Nestlé was responsible for more violations than any other company,

However, a spokesperson from Nestlé accused IBFAN of judging companies based on their own inaccurate interpretation of guidelines for baby milk marketing and said that the portrayal of their marketing is "simply not true." □

*Breaking the Rules, Stretching the Rules 2004* is accessible at [www.ibfan.org](http://www.ibfan.org)



Some mothers believe claims that breast milk substitutes increase intelligence