

bmj.com news roundup

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Body set up to increase numbers taking part in trials

A new body was launched last week to get the NHS and industry working more closely together to increase the number of patients taking part in clinical trials.

The UK Clinical Research Collaboration will bring together key players to speed up the development of medicines in five areas—Alzheimer's disease, stroke, diabetes, mental health, and children's medicine.

Representatives from the NHS, industry, the Medical Research Council and other funding bodies, medical charities, and the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) will make up the new body.

Using the successful National Cancer Research Networks organisation as a model, the collaboration will use an initial £24m (\$44m; €36m) to set up similar research networks in the five new areas.

Dr Liam O'Toole from the National Institute for Cancer Research has been appointed acting chief executive of the new body; Professor John Pattison, the director of research and development at the Department of Health, will be the chairman. Members of the public will also be represented, including people affected by the key conditions.

Rebecca Coombes *London*

Switzerland has opened door to genetic discrimination, say ethicists

A new law on genetic testing in Switzerland has opened the door to discrimination by insurance companies against people with hereditary diseases, an ethics group has said.

Pascale Steck, from the pressure group Basler Appeal against Gene Technology, accused the government of putting the interests of insurance



BMA demands ban on smoking in enclosed workplaces in the United Kingdom

BMA representatives this week delivered 4500 members' letters and a letter from its chairman, Jim Johnson, to the Prime Minister Tony Blair, demanding that the government ban smoking in enclosed workplaces.

The chairman's letter, which was delivered by Dr Sam Everington (above right), the BMA's deputy chairman, and Dr Peter Maguire, deputy chairman of the Board of Science (above left), pointed out that less than 1% of pubs in the United Kingdom are smoke-free. People in lower socioeconomic groups and workers in the hospitality industry were disproportionately exposed to other people's smoke and therefore to the risk of lung cancer.

Mr Johnson wrote: "You will know that I am a vascular surgeon working in one of the most deprived areas of the country. I regularly have to amputate the legs of chronic smokers—and they are not generally from social classes ABC1."

Delivery of the letter followed a resolution at last week's annual meeting of the BMA, which congratulated the government of the Irish Republic for the leadership it had shown by banning smoking in enclosed workplaces by legislation and called on the BMA to lobby government for the immediate introduction of equivalent legislation.

More news of the BMA's annual meeting is available in News Extra at bmj.com

Annabel Ferriman *BMJ*

companies ahead of the needs of the population after it passed laws allowing insurance companies to have limited access to the results of genetic tests.

Under the new rules insurance companies will be able to see results of genetic tests in cases where policy holders plan to take out life insurance policies worth more than SFr400 000 (£180 000; \$320 000; €260 000).

Ms Steck said that letting private insurance companies gain access to such information would lead to the creation of a "genetic underclass" of people who would find it difficult to get life insurance.

Jane Burgermeister *Vienna*

A quarter of UK students are guilty of plagiarism, survey shows

The problem of plagiarism among university students in the United Kingdom, including those in medicine, came under the spotlight at a conference last week organised by the UK Plagiarism Advisory Service.

According to a survey published by the Freshminds recruitment consultancy, as many as one in four university students may have cheated by copying material for essays from the internet.

The online survey was sent out last month to 600 recent graduates from all disciplines and 1000 officials of the National Union of Students. A total of 363 people responded. The survey included 10 returns from students who had done a health related degree, but most replies were from arts students.

It showed that 16% of respondents had plagiarised work more than once and that a further 9% had plagiarised once. The detection rate among those who had plagiarised was 3%. The survey defined plagiarism as "inserting sections of text from any outside source into your own work, whether they are left whole, or amended to conceal their origins."

Lynn Eaton *London*

The survey results are available at www.freshminds.co.uk

Nigerian state of Kano resumes polio vaccination

The northern Nigerian state of Kano has agreed to resume polio vaccination early this month, reviving the hopes of the World Health Organization that transmission of the disease may be permanently halted by the end of the year.

WHO has issued a warning to travellers to Nigeria to ensure that their polio vaccinations are up to date and has reminded them they need a booster every four to six years, otherwise they can become infected and spread the virus.

Polio has been spreading fast across Nigeria since Kano, the largest of the northern Islamic states, suspended vaccination last August, claiming that the oral vaccine caused infertility and led to the spread of HIV.

Since then the disease has infected and paralysed 26 children in 10 African countries that had been free of polio for about three years because of the success of earlier immunisation campaigns (26 June, p 1513). The most recent was a case in Sudan's Darfur region, prompting fears of an epidemic.

Fiona Fleck *Geneva*