

In brief

Avian flu breaks out in Far East:

Fresh outbreaks of avian influenza have occurred in Vietnam, Thailand, and China, and thousands of birds have had to be culled. The cause of the Chinese outbreak, in Anhui province, has been confirmed as the H5N1 virus. So far only poultry has been affected and migratory birds are suspected of having brought the disease to Anhui.

Respect for drug industry falls:

Pharmaceutical companies were ranked in the bottom half of industries considered to be doing "a good job of serving their consumers," a recent US Harris poll shows. They came 11th out of 15; only health insurance companies, oil companies, managed care companies, and tobacco companies had a worse ranking. The annual poll, of 978 adults, shows that the proportion of respondents saying they have a positive attitude towards the pharmaceutical industry fell from 79% in 1997 to 44% in 2004—a bigger drop than for any other industry. See www.harrisinteractive.com/

Mothers in England not given breastfeeding support:

New mothers in England are the least likely in the United Kingdom to be given support with breastfeeding, a report from Unicef UK says. Only 11% of maternity units in England had achieved Unicef's Baby Friendly accreditation—a worldwide initiative to support breastfeeding—compared with 48% in Scotland, 36% in Wales, and 29% in Northern Ireland. See www.babyfriendly.org.uk

McDonald's head launches national diabetes week:

Bill Glasson, the president of the Australian Medical Association, has described inviting the head of McDonald's to launch national diabetes week as like "inviting Dracula to the opening of a blood bank." The not-for-profit organisation Diabetes Australia said that Guy Russo, the head of McDonald's in Australia, had been invited to join its board and launch the event as he had worked to introduce healthier food.

Brown confirms a 7.1% rise in NHS spending next year

Rebecca Coombes *London*

Health was confirmed as the government's biggest spending priority in Chancellor Gordon Brown's UK spending review this week.

The NHS will receive an annual real terms rise of 7.1%—paid for in part by the axing of more than 100 000 civil servants' jobs, including 727 from the Department of Health, and other efficiency savings.

The funding boost, already previewed in April's Budget, will take investment in the NHS from £69bn (\$129bn; €104bn) this year to £92bn by 2007-8, Mr Brown told the House of Commons.

He described the boost as funds "that will go to, and be

spent through, the NHS and by the NHS on patients treated free at the point of need, and not to subsidise private medicine."

The chancellor had good news for those in research and development: he pledged financial backing to university research projects funded by charities. The commitment is expected to total £270m by 2008-10.

Professor Alex Markham, chief executive of Cancer Research UK, said: "This money will go some way towards addressing the serious funding shortfall in universities that arises from them accommodating high quality, charity funded research."

Mr Brown also announced a 2.7% rise in social services spending, up just under £2bn to £13.5bn by 2007-8, with extra care for older people a top priority.

As a crime reduction measure, places in drug rehabilitation centres will continue to rise, from 100 000 six years ago to 200 000 in 2008, he said.

A report outlining the chan-

cellor's three year spending plans detailed the priorities for health spending. They included a target to reduce the wait from GP referral to hospital treatment to a maximum of 18 weeks by 2008; a greater priority on disease prevention; and improved chronic disease management.

New measures to tackle smoking and child obesity will be outlined in the white paper on improving health, due to be published in the autumn.

But the shadow chancellor, Oliver Letwin, said Mr Brown's spending plans would mean third term tax rises from Labour.

He said: "While ministers have been preaching about obesity, their departments have been getting fat on taxpayers' money."

For the Liberal Democrats, Vince Cable cast doubt on Mr Brown's plans to fund increases through efficiency savings: "If this waste is so easily available why hasn't it been dealt with already?" he said. □

BMJ group appoints acting editor and acting chief executive

Annabel Ferriman *BMJ*

The BMJ Publishing Group has appointed Stella Dutton, its executive director, as acting chief executive of the group, and Dr Kamran Abbasi, the *BMJ*'s deputy editor, as the journal's acting editor.

The temporary appointments follow the resignation of Dr Richard Smith as editor of the *BMJ* and chief executive of the publishing group. Dr Smith, who leaves the *BMJ* on 29 July, is to become chief executive of a new European arm of the UnitedHealth Group, a US health-care company (29 May, p 1276).

While Dr Smith filled the dual role of chief executive of the BMJ Publishing Group and editor of the *BMJ*, the two roles are now to be separated.

Mrs Dutton, who takes up the role of the group's acting chief executive, is also chairwoman elect of the International Association of Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishers. After graduating from London University with a chemistry degree, she worked for a number of years with Butter-

worth Scientific as publishing director for its science division.

After leaving Butterworths in 1990, she worked as a strategic planning and marketing director in the NHS and as director of publications at the Royal Pharmaceutical Society before taking up her current post. She is married with two daughters.

Dr Abbasi, who takes up the role as acting editor, followed a

medical degree at Leeds University in 1992 with membership of the Royal College of Physicians. He joined the *BMJ* from the Royal London and St Bartholomew's hospitals in 1997 after training in internal medicine. He was seconded to the World Health Organization in 2000 as editor of its public health journal, the *Bulletin*.

Dr Abbasi helped create BMJ Learning, a publishing group website that caters for doctors' learning needs, and is head of the *BMJ*'s international editions programme. He is married with four children and is a cricket writer for the publisher Wisden. □



Stella Dutton



Kamran Abbasi