

# bmj.com news roundup

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## Doctor shortage forces children's hospital to refuse emergencies

An acute shortage of doctors at Africa's largest children's hospital, the Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town, has forced the hospital to begin refusing emergency admissions.

The hospital had to close its emergency intake wards at night because it had only five doctors doing the work of 14, as vacant posts lie unfilled. The hospital's decision has galvanised the health authorities to make emergency plans to fill some of the shortages at the Red Cross Children's Hospital, a process that can only be temporary, as more than half of places for doctors are unfilled in several large public hospitals in the country.

At the heart of the problem of the shortage of doctors, both at the Red Cross hospital and throughout the country's public hospitals, are bad working conditions, long hours, and poor pay. The situation has been exacerbated by the continuing exodus of doctors from the country.

In recent weeks the statutory registration body, the Health Professions Council of South Africa, has agreed to fast-track the registration process of foreign doctors to relieve pressure, and authorities have agreed to advertise the vacant posts in journals abroad as well as locally.

Pat Sidley Johannesburg

## South African doctors charged with involvement in organ trade

The South African medical establishment has found itself at the heart of an international scandal involving the sale and transplantation of kidneys on three continents.

The donors were mostly poor Brazilians willing to sell a kidney for up to \$10 000 (£5400; €8000) each. The recipients were Israelis who paid up to 10 times that amount for a kidney.

A senior nephrologist, Dr Jeff



## BMA appoints new chief executive and publishing group chairman

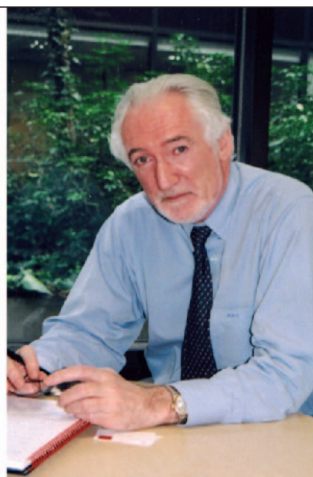
A City of London banker will take over as chief executive of the BMA from January 2005 in one of two new appointments described as "highly significant" by the BMA's chairman, Mr James Johnson.

Mr Tony Bourne (pictured left), aged 50, who has been appointed as secretary and chief executive of the BMA, currently works as a managing director of Hawkpoint, an independent corporate advisory firm, which he helped to found. The company was formed in 1999, after a management buyout from NatWest and the Royal Bank of Scotland.

He replaces lawyer Jeremy Strachan, who is retiring at the end of the year after three years as the association's secretary.

The second appointment by the BMA is of Dr Michael Chamberlain (right) as part-time chairman of the BMJ Publishing Group, succeeding Sir Anthony Grabham. Dr Michael Chamberlain, 56, who has a doctorate in communications from Florida State University, was a founder editor and publisher of *Marketing Week* magazine and editor of *Campaign*, the advertising industry magazine. He has a 30 year career in publishing, and for the last 10 years he has been on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Health Communications*, published by the Taylor and Francis Group.

Lynn Eaton London



Kallmeyer, is on trial in Durban facing charges under the Human Tissues Act. South African law forbids the sale of organs for transplantation and requires the establishment of some relationship between donor and recipient for privately arranged transplantations. Accordingly, it is alleged that the Brazilian donors and Israeli recipients had to sign fraudulent documents stating they were related. Several other surgeons and medical staff have also been arrested and are facing trial.

The main financial beneficiaries, however, seem to have been the intermediaries who organised the transplantations, matching donors and recipients and arranging the logistics in South Africa. South African investi-

gators have frozen the assets of one of these men—an Israeli living in South Africa who is said to be key to the South African operation—while he is tried in Durban.

Pat Sidley Johannesburg

## US government to open national bank of "approved" stem cells

The US Department of Health and Human Services has announced that it will accelerate stem cell research by establishing centres of excellence in translational stem cell research and a national embryonic stem cell

bank using stem cell lines derived before 9 August 2001.

Scientists said the announcement was window dressing to appease political conservatives.

Since 2001, federal funding for new embryonic stem cell lines has been denied because it destroys an embryo, which President Bush says should be protected as human life.

Dr Keith Yamamoto, executive vice medical dean at the University of California at San Francisco, told the *BMJ* that the proposal tried to mollify the scientific community without offending the political base the Bush administration relies on.

Dr Yamamoto said that because the approved stem cell lines were grown on feeder cells from rodents or bovines and with different nutrients, they can't be introduced into people. Thus, researchers need to start with new cells to learn more about the unique properties of stem cells.

Janice Hopkins Tanne *New York*

## Report proposes better ways of measuring NHS output

New ways of measuring the productivity of the NHS are being considered. An ongoing review by a leading economist into refining the methods used to measure government output has welcomed reforms made in health but has added that more needs to be done.

Tony Atkinson, warden of Nuffield College, Oxford University, made the warning this week as he issued a progress report on his review for the Office for National Statistics.

He said reforms were necessary to bring standards up to those expected of EU countries by 2006. Output measures should also take better account of the quality of care given, he added.

Rebecca Coombes London

*Atkinson Review: Interim Report. Measurement of Government Output and Productivity for the National Accounts* is available online ([www.statistics.gov.uk/about/methodology\\_by\\_theme/atkinson/](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/methodology_by_theme/atkinson/))