

bmj.com news roundup

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Pathologists shed new light on Sally Clark case

The evidence for a double homicide in the case of Sally Clark, the solicitor convicted and later cleared on appeal of killing her two baby sons, was "overwhelming," the General Medical Council was told last week.

Alison Armour, a consultant pathologist, said she did not believe that either death was natural. She would not exclude shaken baby syndrome or smothering as the cause of death of Mrs Clark's second son, Harry. Her first son, Christopher, had marks of violence on his body, and she would describe the cause of death as "unascertained."

Dr Armour, a consultant pathologist for Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and a pathologist for the Home Office, was giving evidence on behalf of Dr Alan Williams, the pathologist who carried out post mortem examinations on both babies and who is accused of serious professional misconduct (*BMJ* 2005;330:272, 5 Feb).

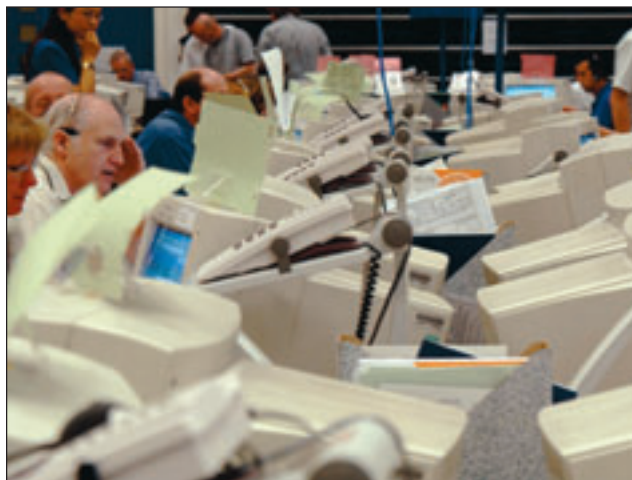
Mrs Clark served nearly three years in prison before her conviction was quashed by the Court of Appeal in 2003.

The appeal court ruled that her conviction was unsafe, because undisclosed test results showed the presence of *Staphylococcus aureus* in various sites in Harry's body, including in the cerebrospinal fluid, raising the possibility—which had not been put before the jury—that he may have died from natural causes.

The GMC panel has finished hearing the evidence, and the case was adjourned until 26 May. Clare Dyer *legal correspondent, BMJ*

Regulator restricts use of SSRIs in children

The European Medicines Agency has ruled that selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) and selective serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs) should not be prescribed for children and



MOK YU HOON/REUTERS

EU starts campaign on noise before it introduces lower workplace limits

Rory Watson *Brussels*

The European Union has launched a campaign to reduce noise levels across the continent, backed by new mandatory rules on the maximum permitted decibel levels at work.

According to the World Health Organization hearing loss caused by noise is "the most prevalent irreversible industrial disease." In the EU alone it is estimated that more than 13 million people—employed not just in heavy industry but in education, entertainment, and the services sector—have impaired hearing from workplace noise.

Vladimir Šapidla, the EU commissioner for social affairs, has endorsed the campaign. He said: "Noise goes beyond hearing problems. It can cause accidents at work and increase stress levels. It is a growing concern all over Europe, in workplaces from factories and farms to schools and call centres." People working in call centres (above) can get acoustic shocks when they experience a sudden increase in high frequency noise.

For more information on the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work's campaign on noise see <http://ew2005.osha.eu.int>

adolescents under the age of 18, except for limited, approved uses. Some of the drugs have been approved for obsessive compulsive disorder, and one of them has been approved for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

It is also recommending that strong warnings should be issued throughout the European Union about the potential risk of suicidal behaviour and aggression in these age groups.

The advice comes two months after a study in the *BMJ* said that people aged under 18 taking SSRIs were more likely to harm themselves than those taking a tricyclic antidepressant (*BMJ* 2005;330:389-93, 19 Feb).

The agency's ruling follows a

review of the two classes of antidepressants published after a meeting 10 days ago at which its scientific committee concluded that these drugs should not be used in children, except in their approved indications. The drugs are licensed for the treatment of depression and anxiety in adults but are not licensed for such treatment in children.

The agency concluded that in clinical trials suicide related behaviour and hostility were more often seen among children and adolescents treated with these drugs than in those treated with placebo.

Lynn Eaton *London*

Further information is available at www.emea.eu.int

Drug company is censured for offering perks to prescribing nurses

The drug company AstraZeneca has been censured by the UK drug industry's watchdog for offering nurses who manage chronic diseases excessive hospitality at educational meetings located in luxury hotels.

The watchdog, the Prescription Medicines Code of Practice Authority, ruled that one of the meetings had breached clause 2 of the code of practice, which says that methods of promotion must never bring discredit on or reduce confidence in the pharmaceutical industry.

The meeting, which AstraZeneca cancelled after a complaint from a local GP, was due to be held at the Cameron House Hotel in Loch Lomond. Nurses were scheduled to have three hours of talks on asthma during a stay of nearly 24 hours at the hotel, which included dinner, bed and breakfast, and lunch.

The authority, which administers the voluntary code of practice for the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry, ruled that the meeting "could have been held over one day without the need to provide overnight accommodation."

AstraZeneca was also reprimanded for another meeting it organised for nurses at the four star Groucho St Jude's hotel in Glasgow which comprised a 45 minute presentation followed by dinner.

AstraZeneca was unable to comment on the rulings. Zosia Kmiotowicz *London*

Data for evaluating drugs is often poor, say experts

Evidence based medicine is moving from relatively simple questions about a drug's safety and effectiveness to thornier questions of relative clinical effectiveness and cost effectiveness, international experts agreed at a meeting last week. The experts, from the United