

bmj.com news roundup

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Attacks on NHS staff increasing, MPs say

The British government is failing to meet self imposed targets on reducing attacks on NHS staff, a report published this week by the Parliamentary committee has said.

The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee said that the number of reported incidents is "clearly going in the wrong direction," with nurses at particularly high risk.

According to the British crime survey 2000, nurses run a 5% risk of being violently assaulted at work in a given year, compared with 1.2% for the average worker. The risk for other healthcare workers, including doctors, is 1.4%.

The Department of Health set targets in 1999 for reducing incidents of violence against staff by 20% by 2001 and 30% by 2003. Instead, in 2000-1, 84 214 incidents of violence and aggression against NHS staff were reported, an increase of 30% over 1998-9. This increase has continued, with 95 501 reported incidents in 2001-2. Only a fifth of NHS trusts achieved the 2001 target.

Owen Dyer *London*

The report, *A Safer Place to Work: Protecting NHS Hospital and Ambulance Staff from Violence and Aggression*, is available at www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/committee_of_public_accounts.cfm

EU commits \$1bn to global fund

The president of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, guaranteed a European contribution of \$1bn (£630m; €890m) for 2004 to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

But he warned that the European Union, with its 15 sovereign states, sometimes worked slowly. President Prodi was speaking last week at an international conference in Paris of representatives of the fund,



KARL-ROLAND SCHROETER/PHOTONICA

Tattooists use pigments designed for car paint

Tattoos and body piercing may be popular fashion accessories, but they can carry considerable health risks, the European Commission says in a new report.

Body piercing can lead to acute infections requiring medical treatment, and since the end of last year two deaths have been reported in Europe from piercing.

Existing national regulations are mainly limited to the prescription of hygiene precautions such as the use of gloves and the sterilisation of needles. They do not tackle the need for a proper toxicological and risk evaluation of materials.

Most chemicals used in tattoos are industrial pigments originally produced for other purposes, such as car paints or writing inks, and have little or no safety data to support their use in this way.

These and other hazards are itemised in the latest comprehensive research results produced by the European Commission.

Rory Watson *Brussels*

Further information is at www.jrc.cec.eu.int

which was attended by President Chirac of France, Tommy Thompson, US secretary of health and human services, and Kofi Annan, secretary general of the United Nations.

The global fund, which was set up in June 2002, supports country based interventions against disease. Since its creation it has received about \$4.6bn in pledges and \$1.4bn in actual donations to finance more than 150 programmes in 92 countries. Of this amount 60% has been allocated to Africa and 65% has been devoted to HIV and AIDS.

The programmes will provide antiretroviral treatment to more than half a million people infected with HIV and will support as many children orphaned by AIDS. It will also cover the detection and treatment of two million cases of tuberculosis and

deliver 20 million combination treatments for drug resistant malaria.

Alexander Dorozynski *Paris*

Consultants are closer to pay deal after winning concessions

Consultants in England could be voting on a new contract by the autumn, after senior doctors secured important concessions from the government last week.

A special meeting of the BMA's consultants' committee will be called next month to discuss the package. If the committee agrees to the package, consultants will be balloted in early September.

Paul Miller, chairman of the

Central Consultants and Specialists Committee, said the biggest gains were that control over doctors by managers would be reduced, new consultants would be on the same contract as longer serving colleagues, a structure for an appeal panel had been worked out, and work at weekends and in evenings would be voluntary.

Senior doctors in England voted by two to one to reject a new contract last October.

Anne Gulland *London*

EU to ban use of unsubstantiated health claims for food products

Food and drink manufacturers will have to prove scientifically the health and nutritional claims they make for their products under new legislation tabled by the European Commission last week.

The legislation would prevent labels that extol virtues attributed to many foods and food supplements we eat—such as being low in energy, fat free, or high in protein—unless the labels fully comply with clear standards.

Similarly, vague terms such as "preserves youth," "improves your memory," or "reduces your calorie intake," which are used as marketing and advertising tools but cannot be substantiated, would also be banned.

David Byrne, the public health commissioner, insisted that the legislation, which must now be approved by EU governments and the European parliament, would enable industry and the public to benefit from the correct use of claims.

Rory Watson *Brussels*

MRC to fund more trials of complex treatments

The UK Medical Research Council (MRC) plans to promote a broader range of clinical trials, moving away from a nar-