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Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Bulletin No. 19 / 14 May 2010

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Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Information

Date of next HOSC meeting: 10 am, 14 May 2010

Location: Council Chamber, Sessions House

Main Agenda Items: The Future of PCT Provider Services and the Use of Community Hospitals

Other Information:

Internal meetings:

There will be a briefing about the Care Quality Commission for HOSC Members on Tuesday 25 May 2010, 10 – 12, Pendragon Room, Invicta House.

NB: The HOSC Meeting originally scheduled for 15 October 2010 will now take place on 8 October.

Department of Health

Wet age-related macular degeneration

The BCC report that the NHS is considering whether to break with convention and recommend the use of an unlicensed treatment for patients at risk of blindness caused by wet age-related macular degeneration.

The preferred option for the condition is Lucentis , which is a costly therapy derived from Avastin, a cheaper drug used for bowel cancer, and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence is now reviewing whether that should be used instead.

The move, if agreed to, would be unusual, although by no means unprecedented, but The National Association for Clinical Excellence (NICE) the official NHS advisory body, normally only considers cases where the drug is licensed for the condition. However, the Department of Health has asked NICE to consider altering its normal procedures because of the unique situation.

See:

[NHS considering 'cheap eye drug'](#)

Government

Government's attempts to improve hospital food

The organisation Sustain has published a second, updated report in their Good Food for our Money campaign, which analyses the Government spending on attempts to improve hospital food.

See:

[Yet more hospital food failure](#)

[Senior government adviser calls for legal standards for hospital food£54m 'wasted' on hospital food initiatives](#)

Other Health Information

Researchers from Cambridge University argue that triglycerides, a type of blood fat different from cholesterol may play a key role in heart disease. The researchers looked at the role of triglycerides, which is produced in the liver and derived from foods such as meat and dairy products, in an analysis from previous studies, and found those with higher levels of the blood fat were more likely to have heart disease.

Previous research has looked into the issue, but has been inconclusive.

But the latest study found those with the variation in the gene which boosted triglyceride levels had an 18% greater risk of heart disease than those that did not. But experts warned more research was needed to confirm the link.

See:

[New blood fat heart disease link](#)

Antisocial behaviour in girls

New research from the University of Cambridge, and published on-line in *Biological Psychiatry* indicates that girls appear to be 'protected' from showing antisocial behaviour until their teenage years.

The study, which compared a group of girls aged 14 – 18 with high levels of antisocial or violent behaviour with a group of healthy controls, is argued to shed new light on antisocial behaviour in girls compared with boys by suggesting that rather than violence or antisocial behaviour simply reflecting bad choices, the brains of people with antisocial behaviour may work differently from those who behave normally.

Until now, little research has been done on antisocial behaviour in girls, and according to Dr Graeme Fairchild of the University of Cambridge, 'almost nothing is known about the

neuropsychology of severe antisocial behaviour in girls'. But although less common in girls than boys, UK crime figures show that serious violence is increasing sharply in female adolescents.

See:

[Violent teenage girls fail to spot anger or disgust in others' faces](#)

WHO website

The World Health Organization has launched a website which aims to help cut the estimated 100,000 deaths caused annually by snake poison.

The site contains a database of approved antivenoms to treat the 2.5 million people who suffer venomous bites each year. The U.N. health agency said.

Antivenoms — antidotes developed from the venom itself — can prevent disability or death, but WHO says many are inappropriate and have led to a loss of confidence among doctors and patients, especially in tropical and subtropical countries.

See:

[Life s-s-s-saver? WHO launches snake venom website](#)

Development of muscle

Scientists have cross-linked polymer to create a substance that mimics and reproduces the properties of titin, a protein which largely determines the tough, stretchy, elastic properties of muscle. Initially, the discovery could assist in the healing of tissue tears, acting as a tough stretchy scaffold that allows new tissue to grow across the wound, and researchers also argue that the material could find a potential application as a 'scaffold' to aid muscle regeneration.

The work, by a US-Canadian team of researchers, is reported in the latest issue of the journal *Nature*.

See:

[Novel material 'mimics muscles'](#)

Getting children to eat more fruit

Researchers who studied pupils in the Netherlands and Belgium found that making fruit palatable, could hold the key to getting children to consume more fruit.

The journal *Appetite* where the research is published also argues that in tests, when offered the same amount and types of fruit, children ate far more if it was made fun and attractive. As well as arguing that parents and schools would follow this example, the researchers argue for full effect, it is necessary for food presentations to remain innovative and present fruit in different ways.

See:

[Children will eat more fruit 'as long as it looks good'](#)

Paget's disease

Arthritis Research UK-funded scientists have discovered three genes linked to the development of Paget's disease, a painful bone condition that disrupts the body's normal process of breaking down old bone and replacing it. The condition leads to enlarged and malformed bones and patients can suffer from bone pain, brittle bones susceptible to fractures, and advanced arthritis, and affects up to one million people in the UK.

The international team of scientists, led by the University of Edinburgh, believes the genes are involved in regulating the rate at which bone is repaired, providing an explanation of why the disease might occur. Identifying the genes that predispose people to the bone disease could lead to the development of a screening test to identify those most at risk, and improve access to preventative treatment.

See:

[Screening test hope in painful bone disease](#)

Systemic scleroderma

Scientists have discovered a new genetic link to systemic scleroderma, a disabling autoimmune disease which affects the connective tissue that lies beneath the skin and surrounds the joints, blood vessels and internal organs.

In an article in the journal Nature Genetics, scientists at the University of Texas Health Science Centre at Houston (UTHealth) publish research involving a technique that detects genetic variations associated with a particular disease to compare the genes of 2,296 people with systemic scleroderma and a further 5,171 disease-free volunteers. The comparison highlighted a genetic region known as CD247, which is known to contain a gene involved in immunity, and further confirmation was provided by additional gene analysis.

Senior author Dr Maureen Mayes, professor of rheumatology at UTHealth, commented: "With our latest discovery, we are probably a quarter of the way to finding the genes and pathways responsible for systemic scleroderma."

See:

[Scientists discover genetic link to systemic scleroderma](#)

Green exercise

A new study published in the journal Environmental Science and Technology indicates finds that small doses of 'green exercise' or outdoor activity in a pleasant outdoor environment, can boost mental health, mood and self-esteem.

The study, which looked at evidence from 1,250 people over 10 studies found evidence that just five minutes of green exercise or combining activities such as walking or cycling found fast improvements in mood and self-esteem, with the biggest impact on young people.

See:

[Green exercise may be good for your head](#)

['Green' exercise quickly 'boosts mental health'](#)

Children and television viewing

A study of 1,300 children by Michigan and Montreal universities found negative effects on older children rose with every hour of toddler TV.

Performance at school was worse, while consumption of junk foods was higher

Researchers asked parents how much television their children watched at 29 months (two years and five months) and 53 months (four years and five months). They found that on average, the two-year-olds watched just under nine hours of TV per week, while the four-year-olds averaged just under 15 hours of television viewing. However, 11% of the two-year-olds and 23% of four-year-olds watched more than the recommended maximum of two hours of television a day.

The children were revisited at the age of 10, when their teachers were asked to assess the children's academic performance, behaviour and health, and in addition, their body mass index (BMI). At that point, the children who at two were recorded with higher levels of TV viewing were also linked by researchers to a lower level of engagement in the classroom and poor achievement in maths. In addition, for these children, researchers also found a decrease in general physical activity but an increase in the consumption of soft drinks and in BMI (body mass index).

See:

['Long-term harm' of too much TV for toddlers](#)

Overweight children

Research carried out in a group of 400 Greek primary school children aged between 5 and 10 years, indicates that children's popularity at school is directly proportional to their size, with findings that overweight children are rejected and ridiculed by their peers.

Within the group, almost one quarter (24%) were overweight for their age, and 12% were obese. Comparable UK figures from the Government's National Child Measurement Programme in schools indicates that by the final year of primary school, nearly one in three British children aged 10 or 11 is overweight. Researcher Ekaterina Kornilaki, argues that this could mean that children in Britain are even more rejected and neglected by their peers, because Greek society is culturally more tolerant of overweight children.

See:

[Children's popularity directly linked to their size, study finds](#)

See also:

Childhood obesity

A seminar published on Online First and in a forthcoming issue of *The Lancet* argues that the prevalence of childhood obesity in the USA, the UK and Sweden could be stabilising, but much work and front line therapy intervention is still needed to combat such a major health hazard.

In 2010, more than 40 per cent of children in the North American and eastern Mediterranean World Health Organisation (WHO) regions, 38 per cent in Europe, 27 per cent in the western Pacific and 22 per cent in southeast Asia are predicted to be overweight or obese.

See:

[Obesity epidemic may be flattening out - but no time for complacency say experts](#)

Ischaemic heart disease in women as a direct result of work-related stress.

Danish research published in the journal *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* and based on a long term study of 12,116 female Danish nurses indicates that excessive pressure at work doubles the risk of developing cardiac problems, and women in high-pressure jobs face up to twice the normal risk of developing ischaemic heart disease as a direct result of work-related stress.

The research adds to the previous body of evidence suggesting harmful effects of excessive psychological demands at work on cardiac health, and indicates that while the link between stress and cardiac disease is well-known, most previous studies have concentrated on its impact on men's health. The new findings are among the first to assess if there is a similar link and harmful effects in women.

See:

[Women's hearts at risk from stress at work :study](#)

Proposed regulation of psychotherapists

The Guardian reports that to avoid Government regulation of their profession, psychotherapists are considering adopting new job titles. Some will drop the title of psychotherapist or counsellor and will instead describe themselves 'Jungian analyst', 'psychoanalyst', 'body therapist' or 'humanistic therapist' instead.

In addition, about 3,000 psychotherapists have signed a petition objecting to regulation by the Government's Health Professions Council (HPC), which already regulates and disciplines other groups with registered titles, such as psychologists and arts therapists.

See:

[Psychotherapy rebels consider rebranding to avoid state regulation](#)

Depression and men

The Guardian reports that Paul Farmer, chief executive of MIND, the mental health charity, argues that vast numbers of men are suffering from depression in the UK but missing out on treatment, owing to the skewed criteria used by GPs to diagnose the illness.

Mr. Farmer says men are just as likely to suffer from mental distress as women of the same age and are far more likely to kill themselves – the highest suicide risk group in the UK is now men aged between 40 and 49. But because of the emphasis on typically female issues and symptoms under the categories used to understand how depression works, the extent of the problem among men is largely hidden.

See:

[Depressed men missing out on treatment](#)

Stress at work

The HSE have published research and statistics on stress at work, and work related stress.

See:

[Stress at work: work related stress: research and statistics](#)

Lyme disease

The Health Protection Agency is advising people to take care when visiting areas where ticks are present, to prevent tick bites and reduce the risk of catching Lyme disease.

Ticks can be found in forests, heaths, moorland areas and in suburban parkland. Any area, large or small, in which ticks are present should be regarded as having a potential risk of Lyme disease. In recent years according to HPA figures there have been around 800 laboratory-confirmed cases reported annually in patients from England, Wales and Northern Ireland, with an estimated 2000 to 3000 cases a year in total,

See:

[Be tick aware when visiting the great outdoors](#)

HIV research

Research published in the journal Nature indicates that research is a step closer to understanding why some people have natural protection against HIV and also may help international efforts to design an effective Aids vaccine.

See:

[New hope for HIV vaccine efforts](#)

Maclaren buggies

The BBC report that children who have been injured by the hinge mechanism of collapsible Maclaren buggies are to be recompensed, and lawyers for the children will meet Maclaren representative to negotiate a sum of compensation.

Maclaren said the compensation was not an admission of liability and it took children's safety 'very seriously'.

See:

[Pushchair maker Maclaren agrees compensation](#)

Research on sleep

Italian research to be published in *Sleep Journal* argues that less than six hours sleep a night can lead to premature death. The research, that looked at the relationship between sleep and

mortality, indicated that people regularly having such little sleep were 12% more likely to die over a 25-year period than those who got an 'ideal' six to eight hours.

The research, which was based on 1.5 m people in 16 studies, also found an association between sleeping for more than nine hours and early death, although that much sleep may merely be a marker of ill health.

See:

[Lack of sleep 'linked to early death'](#)

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Research for multiple sclerosis sufferers

Researchers from University of Bristol and North Bristol NHS Trust have completed a groundbreaking trial to test bone marrow stem cell therapy with a small group of patients with multiple sclerosis (MS), which has been shown to have possible benefits for the treatment of the disease.

Bone marrow stem cells have been shown in several experimental studies to have beneficial effects in disease models of MS. The research team report on this pioneering trial in an article published online in *Clinical Pharmacology and Therapeutics*. The paper, [Safety and feasibility of autologous bone marrow cellular therapy in relapsing-progressive multiple sclerosis](#) was performed at the [Institute of Clinical Neurosciences](#), Frenchay Hospital, Bristol and the Bristol Haematology and Oncology Centre.

See:

[Bone marrow stem cells in MS show promise](#)

[Frenchay Hospital trials offer MS stem cell hopes](#)

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