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Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Bulletin No. 20 / 14 May 2010

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Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Information

Date of next HOSC meeting: 10 am, 11 June 2010

Location: Council Chamber, Sessions House

Main Agenda Items: Accessing Mental Health Services: Adult and older People's Inpatient Services.

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

Hospital episode statistics

The Department of Health (DOH) has published the monthly 'Provisional Monthly Hospital Episode Statistics for Admitted patient care and outpatient data, April 2009 - December 2009' detailing admissions to NHS hospitals in England.

See:

[Provisional Monthly Hospital Episode Statistics for Admitted patient care and outpatient data, April 2009 - December 2009](#)

[Provisional monthly HES data for inpatients](#)

Care summary records

The Daily Telegraph report that the agency tasked with rolling out the new NHS electronic records database to create patients' care summary records, has been accused of scaring patients into agreeing that their personal information is included, by warning of 'adverse consequences' if people chose to opt out.

The aim of care summary records is to make it easier for medical staff to access patients' medical histories, but the programme has been beset by technical problems and the Government halted the national roll-out of the system after it emerged that data could have been logged on the system without patients' knowledge. Information about more than 1.25 million patients have already gone on to the database, which eventually could hold up to 50 million records.

See:

[NHS 'scaring patients into accepting electronic records database'](#)

Local ingredients for hospital menus

Nottingham City Hospital and the Queen's Medical Centre have begun to serve hospital food cooked with fresh local ingredients, and argue that the initiative could put hundreds of millions of pounds back into the NHS.

The Trust argues that the daily plate saving from sourcing food locally is £2.50 per patient, which adds up to £6m a year. Trust catering manager John Hughes said up to £400m could be saved annually if it were rolled out across the NHS.

See:

[Use of local food boosts hospital funds](#)

Heart attack survival rates

Academics at the University of Bristol and the London School of Economics found that heart attack survival rates are lower in areas where there is a large difference between the wages earned by nurses in the NHS and other women in the same area working in private companies.

The study argues that for every extra 10 per cent the local private sector workers earn, there is an extra seven per cent risk of not surviving a heart attack in the local NHS hospital because nurses in affluent areas are more likely to leave to work in less affluent areas where their salary would go further, leading to greater reliance on agency nurses and inexperienced staff.

See:

[Nurses wages affect heart attack survival rates: researchers](#)

Government

Secretary of State for Health

Andrew Lansley CBE has been appointed as Secretary of State for Health.

Mr Lansley is the MP for South Cambridgeshire and previously served as the Shadow Health Secretary – a position he held from 2003.

See:

[New Health Secretary appointed](#)

NHS efficiency savings

The *Daily Telegraph* report that Andrew Lansley, the Health Secretary has warned that the NHS will not be spared the efficiency savings which the Government will impose on the entire public sector.

Although the Health Secretary argues that overall spending on the NHS will rise in real terms, the 'substantial increase' in health spending over the past decade was 'not sustainable for the future'.

See:

[Coalition government: National Health Service faces cuts, says Andrew Lansley](#)

Parliament

Pandemic influenza and swine flu

The House of Commons Library has published a Standard Note '[Pandemic influenza and swine flu](#)' which provides background information on pandemic influenza and the 2009 H1N1 swine flu outbreak, and concentrates on Government and parliamentary activity related to planning and response.

Health warnings on tobacco packaging

The House of Commons Library has published a Standard Note '[Cigarette packs and labelling](#)' which summarises the legislation concerning health warnings on tobacco packaging.

Public conveniences

The House of Commons Library has released a Standard Note '[Public conveniences](#)' which details the law and standards relating to the provision of public conveniences, and also provides information about provision of toilets on public transport and in schools.

Workplace temperature

The House of Commons Library has released a Standard Note '[Workplace temperature](#)' which sets out controls on workplace temperature, but also argues that there is no simple answer as to what the minimum or maximum workplace temperature should be. The most explicit requirements for workplace temperatures appear in the *Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations* SI 1992/3004.

Other Health Information

IDeA has published '[Adult safeguarding scrutiny guide](#)' which considers how local arrangements work to safeguard adults in the local authority area and how Overview and Scrutiny Committees can contribute to better safeguarding in this complex and sensitive area of public service.

The guide is designed to assist officers, Members and independent chairs to shape and develop the best way to exercise their responsibilities locally.

See:

[Adult Safeguarding Scrutiny Guide April 2010](#)

Hospital doctors and whistleblowing

A study by BMA Scotland found that many hospital doctors are too scared to raise concerns about patient care or staff behaviour in case it affects their career. The study found 40% of the 384 doctors questioned do not report issues of concern, and the organisation called for doctors to be given more protection from managers.

BMA Scotland said it had 'concerns' about the culture within the NHS, and insisted doctors should not be afraid to blow the whistle. Dr Charles Saunders, chairman of the BMA's Scottish Consultants Committee, said doctors had a 'duty' to speak out when they are worried about hospital practices

Premature babies are more sensitive to pain than healthy newborns

Researchers argue that due to invasive hospital treatments, premature babies feel pain more acutely than healthy newborns. The study, published in the journal *NeuroImage* argues that procedures like tube feeding, injections and blood tests make pre-term infants more sensitive to pain, and researchers think that better pain relief should be given to premature babies in intensive care.

See:

[Premature babies 'more sensitive to pain', study shows](#)

November 2009 quarterly statistics for maternity allowance

The Department of Health (DOH) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has released 'Maternity allowance quarterly statistics, November 2009'

See:

[Maternity Allowance: quarterly statistics: November 2009](#)

Breast cancer research

Research published in Nature Genetics, has scanned the entire genetic code of 4,000 British patients with a family history of breast cancer, and identified an additional five genetic clues which, in addition to other already known common genetic variations, could go some way to answering questions regarding why breast cancer occurs.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in the UK with more than 45,500 new cases diagnosed each year, and it is thought about one in 20 of all breast cancers are down to inherited faults in known genes, but the precise reasons why breast cancer develops are still unknown. However, inherited, environmental and lifestyle factors are all thought to play a role.

Meningitis C vaccine

Research carried out by the Oxford Vaccine Group, suggests that three-quarters of children vaccinated against meningitis C lose their protection against the disease by their early teens.

The study looked at immunity seven years after the initial immunisation, argue that their findings indicate the need for a booster jab to be offered to adolescents. Professor Pollard, the lead researcher said: 'This study is just the latest to show that the personal protection given by meningitis C vaccines in early childhood doesn't last forever and several countries have now responded to these findings by introducing teenage boosters, before protection fails in the population.'

See:

[Meningitis C vaccine 'wears off in early teens'](#)

Opt-out organ donation system

The Kidney Wales Foundation have launched a campaign asking people across the UK to back an opt-out organ donation system. The move is aimed at boosting organs available for transplants.

The Assembly Government announced plans last year for Welsh residents to be presumed organ donors unless they or their relatives object, and now the Foundation is calling for the rest

of the UK to follow the proposals. The so-called "soft opt-out" system is similar to that already used in Belgium and Portugal, where organ donation rates are far higher than in the UK.

See:

[Kidney Wales Foundation launches donor campaign](#)

Blood pressure

Writing in the *British Medical Journal* an Australian research team argue that the 'white-coat' effect, where blood pressure rises during a check by a doctor, or during a hospital visit, is even worse in someone whose level is already high.

The research team argue that giving people a cuff to wear for 24 hours is a better way of checking blood pressure. High blood pressure affects about 40% of adults in the UK and is a major risk factor for heart attack, heart failure, kidney disease and stroke.

See:

[Doctors 'cause blood pressure to rise'](#)

West Midlands Ambulance Service survey

A staff survey conducted by West Midlands Ambulance Service which included a question asking staff if they thought Adolf Hitler was a 'cool' leader, met with criticism and staff complained to their trade union Unison.

But the service defended the survey, which asked staff to rate leaders like Gordon Brown and Richard Branson, and a spokesman for the service argued that the project was to look at the characteristics of good leadership, to allow the organisation to be more efficient.

See:

[West Midlands Ambulance Service defend 'Hitler' survey](#)

Researchers argue nuts reduces cholesterol

American researchers argue that eating nuts may help lower cholesterol levels. A review of 25 studies, involving nearly 600 people, showed eating an average 67g of nuts - a small bag - a day reduced cholesterol levels by 7.4%.

Researchers at the US Loma Linda University team argued that nuts may help prevent the absorption of cholesterol.

However, UK experts said the research showed nuts were an important part of a healthy diet, but warned against eating nuts covered in sugar or salt.

See:

[Eating nuts can lower cholesterol, say experts](#)

Child Trust Fund arrangements for looked after children

HM Revenue and Customs has produced a commentary regarding the special Child Trust Fund arrangements for looked after children to ensure that they do not miss out on a Child Trust Fund account.

As part of these arrangements, local authorities and health trusts have a statutory duty to provide some basic information to HM Revenue & Customs about the looked after children, and guidance setting out the special arrangements for looked after children and the obligations they place on Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Wales and Health and Social Services Trusts in Northern Ireland has been finalised and is available on the Revenue and Customs webpages.

See:

[Child Trust Fund and Local Authorities and Health and Social Services Trusts](#)

Heart disease

A study of 6,000 British civil servants suggests that workers who regularly put in overtime and work 10 or 11-hour days increase their heart disease risk by nearly two-thirds

The findings, to be published online in the *European Heart Journal* indicate that after accounting for known heart risk factors such as smoking, those who regularly work three to four hours of overtime a day ran a 60% higher risk of heart disease.

Experts said the findings, which are to be published on-line in the *European Heart journal* highlighted the importance of work-life balance.

See:

[Working overtime increases heart risk, a study finds](#)

Hearing mother's voice can soothe a child

A study made by US researchers indicates that a working mother who cannot be at home to cuddle a distraught child can nevertheless soothe the child with a phone call.

The study found that girls in a stressful situation responded equally to their mother's voice on the phone, and to a hug, because their mother's voice produced virtually the same amount of the stress-quelling hormone oxytocin as physical comfort.

The findings appear in the journal *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*.

See:

[Mother's phone call 'can be as soothing as a hug'](#)

Intravenous injections and infants

Researchers in Canada argue that to reduce babies' pain after an intravenous injection, babies should first be given something sugary. The data from the study at the University of Toronto, found newborns are 20 % less likely to cry if given a few drops of a glucose solution before the procedure.

In addition, researchers found that between a few drops and half a teaspoon of sucrose and glucose also led to a small reduction in the amount of time a baby spent crying.

See:

[Sugar drops 'ease baby jab pain'](#)

Mental health of military personnel deployed in Afghanistan

A study '[The mental health of UK military personnel revisited](#)' which to be published in *The Lancet* examines the effect of deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan on the mental health of military personnel from 2003 to 2009, and also provides a follow-up to the group's 2006 *Lancet* papers, which assessed the health of armed forces deployed in Iraq from 2003 to 2005.

The investigators show that the most common mental health problems reported by personnel continue to be alcohol misuse and common mental health disorders, rather than probable post-traumatic stress disorder, and overall, the prevalence of mental health disorders in the UK armed forces remains stable.

See also:

[Mental trauma 'not rife among UK troops'](#)

Problems with transferring patients

The BBC report that unnecessary risks are being taken when transferring seriously ill people from hospital to hospital because the medical staff often have to rely on batteries to power the vital equipment the patient needs, and these are prone to failing.

See:

[Hospital transfer 'battery risks'](#)

Tibetans ability to live at high altitudes

A study carried out by researchers from the University of Utah has found that the ability of Tibetans to live on the 'roof of the world' may be down to their DNA, which contains 10 genes, two of which are linked to haemoglobin, the substance in blood that transports oxygen around the body.

The study, which is to be published in *Science* argues that this combination helps Tibetans thrive at heights where others get sick, and could lead to treatments for severe forms of altitude sickness and other illnesses.

See:

[DNA clue to life at high altitude](#)

Cost of tackling swine flu

A survey conducted by *The Times* of 107 primary care trusts, suggests that the cost of tackling swine flu forced about one in six health authorities to cut other services last year. The survey showed the cost of responding to swine flu was £340,000 on average per trust, and of 56 PCTs who responded in full, 4 per cent spent £500,000 or less while 9 per cent spent more than £600,000.

In addition, the Department of Health is estimated to have spent more than £1 billion on vaccines and anti-viral treatments, but the full cost is not likely to be calculated until an independent review is published later this year.

See:

[Health trusts cut services to fund swine flu response, suggests poll](#)

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