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Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Bulletin No. 39 / 25 September 2009.

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The Director of Public Prosecutions, Keir Starmer QC has launched an interim policy on prosecuting cases of assisted suicide and has called for public participation in a 12-week consultation on the factors he has identified which will be taken into account when considering whether prosecutions will be brought for this offence.

Mr Starmer The policy states that Prosecutors must decide the importance of each public interest factor in the circumstances of each case and go on to make an overall assessment. But he argues that assessing the public interest is not simply a matter of adding up the number of factors on each side and seeing which side of the scales has the greater number. Each case must be considered on its own facts and its own merits.

(See also:

[*A public consultation on the DPP's interim policy for prosecutors on assisted suicide*](#)

[*DPP publishes interim policy on prosecuting assisted suicide*](#)

The closing date for responses is 16 December 2009.

Also:

The House of Commons Library has published a Standard Note on [*'Assisted suicide'*](#) which provides background to the offence of assisting a person to commit suicide under the *Suicide Act 1961*, in the context of terminally ill people who may be unable to end their lives without the assistance of family or friends.

The DCSF is revising the National Minimum Standards for Adoption, Children's Homes and Fostering, and is consulting on the revisions and for comments on how to improve the standards.

Regulations and national minimum standards (NMS) are the basis for the inspection of adoption, children's homes and fostering by Ofsted. Regulations are mandatory - service providers must comply with them. NMS are taken into account by Ofsted when deciding whether the service is complying with the regulations and providing an acceptable level of service. As well as being used in the inspection of services, the NMS are also used by providers, homes and agencies to self-assess the services they provide, for the induction and training of staff and carers and as a guide to parents, carers, prospective adopters, children and young people as to what they can expect from the service.

[The proposals](#) are available on the Department's website with [response forms and other relevant documentation](#).

The Consultation continues until Thursday, 17 December 2009.

E.Politix report that a fringe event at the Liberal Democratic Party conference argued that 'the chilling effect' of [libel laws](#) on free speech has become "dangerous and intolerable,"

Speaking to a packed audience on Sunday, journalists and representatives of Sense About Science said that British libel law must be reformed to protect scientific debate.

Science writer Simon Singh spoke of his own experience fighting a libel case against the British Chiropractors' Association, which sued him over an article criticising claims that chiropractics can cure asthma. He argued that the cost of defending such cases is prohibitively high. 'We have a libel system where victory means still losing £50,000 and two years of your life, never mind what losing means'

E.Politix report that the Liberal Democrat conference has approved a policy motion demanding a public inquiry into whether the [UK was complicit with torture](#). It has been alleged that the British government had a policy between 2002 and 2005 that permitted the UK's intelligence services to act in ways that may have given rise to complicity in torture and illegal abduction. Delegates to the Lib Dems' autumn conference in Bournemouth overwhelmingly backed the motion.

E.Politix report that a fringe meeting at the Liberal Democrat conference argue that the [current policy on drugs is 'wrong'](#) and is a cause rather than a solution to current problems. The newly-formed Liberal Democrats for Drug Policy Reform organised the event, entitled 'What can be gained from thoughtful drug policy reform?' The meeting was addressed by Dr Evan Harris, Danny Kushlik from Transform, Graham Watson MEP and Ewan Hoyle from Liberal Democrats for Drug Policy Reform.

A New Local Government Network (NLGN) article ['Let patients choose their doctors'](#) argues that underpinning the decision of Secretary of State for Health Andy Burnham to open up patient access to GPs, is an increasing recognition by all political parties that the citizen, as well as the professional, should have a greater say in when, where and how services are accessed.

The National Health Service (NHS) have published revised guidance ['NHS \(Pharmaceutical Services\) Regulations: Information for Primary Care Trusts'](#). The guidance is designed to assist Primary Care Trusts in the assessment and determination of applications to provide NHS pharmaceutical services. It incorporates reforms effective from 1 April 2005 to the regulatory system and amendments to the Regulations since. This includes the amendments which came into force on 17 September as SI 2009/2205.

The guidance and other relevant documents are available on the [NHS publications web pages](#).

A report from the NHS Information Centre ['Autism Spectrum Disorders in adults living in households throughout England: report from the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2007'](#). The report presents data on the presence of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), based on the data collected at phases one and two of the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS) 2007.

Key facts of the report are:

- Using the recommended threshold of a score of 10 or more on the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule, 1.0 per cent of the adult population had ASD. Published childhood population studies show the prevalence rate among children is also approximately 1.0 per cent.
- The ASD prevalence rate was higher in men (1.8 per cent) than women (0.2 per cent). This fits with the gender profile found in childhood population studies.
- There is no indication of any increased use of treatment or services for mental or emotional problems among adults with ASD. This is borne out by the recent National Audit Office publication "Supporting People with Autism Through Adulthood".
- A greater proportion of single people were assessed with ASD than people of other marital statuses combined. This was particularly evident among men.

- Prevalence of ASD was associated with educational qualification, particularly among men. The rate for men was lowest among those with a degree level qualification and highest among those with no qualifications.

(See also:

[Study finds no evidence of autism surge in children](#)

The Joseph Rowntree foundation has published two reports on the role of fathers as parents.

[The first report](#) tries to answer the question: "To what extent is there a 'common model' of fatherhood in a modern multicultural Britain that is changing fast". It sets out to investigate the parenting beliefs and practices of fathers from 29 'ordinary' two-parent families living in non-affluent neighbourhoods from four ethnic groups: White British, Black African, Black Caribbean and Pakistani.

Read full report: [Understanding fathering: masculinity, diversity and change](#)

[Read summary report](#)

[The second report](#) looks at the parenting among minority ethnic populations in the UK. This is a qualitative study, which draws on focus group discussions and interviews, captures the views of Bangladeshi Muslim, Pakistani Muslim, Gujarati Hindu and Punjabi Sikh fathers and mothers.

Read full report: [Understanding the experiences of Asian fathers](#)

[Read summary report](#)

The future global burden of Alzheimer's and other types of dementia has been underestimated, say UK experts.

A [report from King's College London](#) suggests more than 115 million people across the globe will suffer from dementia by 2050. This prediction is 10% more than previous figures published in 2005, driven mainly by new figures from South Asia and Latin America. The Alzheimer's Society said the data showed the "scale of the challenge". The rise in dementia fuelled by increasing life expectancies in countries around the world is causing widespread concerns.

A bus is to travel around Kent town centres at night offering on-board tests for sexual infections.

[The Urban Blue Bus](#), which will be parked near pubs and clubs in Dartford and Gravesend, will provide medical help to night-time revellers. Chlamydia "hit squads" are also visiting a number of Freshers' fairs at universities and colleges in west Kent. Screeners will invite students to get tested for chlamydia, which if left untreated can cause infertility.

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has set out its concerns around the lack of communication between care homes and hospitals in preventing infections passing between these two settings.

[The CQC found](#) that there was a need for hospitals and care homes to provide information about infections to each other to make sure that people with, or recovering from, an infection are cared for properly and to reduce the chances of other people being infected. But the report highlights that this information is not provided in a coordinated way with 17% of the care homes participating in the study saying that they received no information on infections at all when people were discharged from a hospital to their care. Even when information was received, this could be weeks late, incomplete or illegible.

Read the full report: [Working together to prevent and control infections](#)

A research report from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) [‘Employment support for carers’](#) presents the findings of a qualitative research study to examine and understand what employment support is needed for carers in order for them to take up and remain in work. Many carers who are not currently working would like to do so and the DWP is keen to understand the support they require to achieve this.

The background to the project is the DWP's aim to promote work as the best form of welfare for people of working age by ensuring that work is seen as the best way out of poverty, while protecting the position of those in greatest need.

Schools Minister Vernon Coaker has announced the ten successful pilot areas who will look at how local services can best be co-ordinated and tailored to the needs of families where there are separating and separated parents. The £4.75m project aims to improve the wellbeing of families caught up in divorce and separation with help from, local services including counselling, and mediation, practical and legal support.

The Minister argues that as well as improving life chances for children, these pilots have a remit to improve the health and economic wellbeing of families during relationship breakdowns., and they are another vital step in the Government's commitment to eradicating child poverty by 2020.

(See:

[Children, Schools and Families Minister: Piloting innovative support for separated parents Table of areas](#)

A New Local Government Network (NLGN) article ['Let patients choose their doctors'](#) argues that underpinning the decision of Secretary of State for Health Andy Burnham to open up patient access to GPs, is an increasing recognition by all political parties that the citizen, as well as the professional, should have a greater say in when, where and how services are accessed

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The guidance and other relevant documents are available on the [NHS publications web pages](#).

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) have published a national study ['The right information, in the right place, at the right time'](#) which looked at information governance in healthcare organisations in light of increased awareness of its importance and issues beyond the headlines generated by recent breaches in data security. The study aimed to:

- Analyse the performance of healthcare organisations in relation to information governance, to identify those parts of the health service that comply with good practice and those that perform less well.
- Analyse and describe how information governance has changed between 2006 and 2009.
- Analyse and describe those elements of information governance that affect the quality of care for patients.
- Identify how organisations overcome the barriers to managing personal information effectively.

(See also:

[CQC calls for better patient care by ensuring the right patient information is in the right place, at the right time](#)

The Department for Health (DH) report the availability to authorised practitioners of *ContactPoint* a nationally available online directory providing the quick way for those practitioners to find out who else is working with the same child or young person. This makes it easier to deliver more coordinated support and to improve services to children, with a strong emphasis on early intervention and prevention.

The documents relating to [ContactPoint](#) are available on the DH publications webpages.

The NHS Stop Smoking Services argue new figures indicate that at least 70,000 lives have been in the ten years since the services were established.

NHS Stop Smoking Services celebrate their ten-year anniversary this month, and during the last decade, the number of people smoking in the UK has plummeted, with smoking prevalence among the general population dropping from 28 % to below 21 %. Building on the UK's cutting-edge smokefree policies, the development of the NHS Stop Smoking Services has been pivotal in achieving these successes.

Minister for Public Health, Gillian Merron said 'I am proud of the hard work behind every one of these 70,000 success stories. Every life saved represents a battle against an addiction, and a triumph for the individual and their family. To stop smoking is hard, but thanks to free local NHS Stop Smoking Services, people are now more likely to succeed.'

(See:

[70,000 lives saved by NHS Stop Smoking Services](#)

The second year evaluation report of the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) by the University of London, Birbeck, ['Nurse-Family partnership programme: second year pilot sites implementation in England: the Infancy Period'](#) reports on the joint initiative between the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the Department of Health, (DH).

The Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) is a £36 million programme providing intensive support for vulnerable first time young mothers and their families. Specially trained nurses work with them from early pregnancy until the child is two years old, building close relationships and guiding them towards adopting healthy lifestyles for themselves and their babies.

Key indications from the report are:-

- Effective delivery is having a positive impact on some of the most vulnerable young families in society.
- There are early signs that the programme is having a positive effect on reducing smoking during pregnancy and increasing rates of breastfeeding.
- Mothers value the programme and believe it has made a positive difference to how they care for their baby and their own aspirations for the future.
- Fathers involvement is especially high with more than half of Fathers present for at least one pregnancy visit.
- A strong nurse-client relationship is key to its success – and clients are overwhelmingly positive about their family nurses, rating them on average 9 out of 10.
- Nurses have reported that their clients are more confident as parents, were playing with their children more, wanted to learn and had aspirations for the future.

(See also:

[Family nurse partnership improving outcomes for vulnerable families](#)

[Family nurse partnership improving outcomes for vulnerable families: press release](#)

The House of Commons library has published a standard note ['Sources of social statistics; health services and public health'](#) which is intended as a guide to the key sources in health services and public health statistics. It represents a self-help guide, providing a starting point for those interested in obtaining statistics for themselves.

The Department of Health (DH) have produced ['Let's Get Moving - A new physical activity care pathway for the NHS: Commissioning guidance'](#) which sets out an evidence-based behaviour charter model **Let's Get Moving encouraging local commissioning of physical activity interventions in primary care. The physical activity care pathway for the NHS argues that there is a new recognition across the NHS that active lifestyles are now an intrinsic part of 21st-century healthcare. Promoting active lifestyles is a simple answer to many of the big health challenges facing our country today.**

(See also:

[Let's Get Moving - patient resource](#)

The Independent reports that research by the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York and published in the New England Journal of Medicine, suggests that early prescription of

the drug Rasagiline may be the best way to delay progress of [Parkinson's disease](#). The study of Parkinson's, which was of the world's largest studies of the condition and involved 1,176 patients with early stage Parkinson's in 14 countries including the UK, indicated that the drug Rasagiline delayed neurological deterioration. Although the drug is already used to treat Parkinson's disease symptoms, doctors were reluctant to prescribe in early stages of the disease, as the long term advantages were not proven, but the researchers found that after 18 months, patients who had received early treatment with 1mg of the drug daily had not deteriorated as much as those in whom treatment was delayed by nine months. The difference was small, they said, but clinically significant.

The Daily Telegraph report that fees paid to [rural GP surgeries](#) are under threat and may be forced to cut back services, as fees paid to them for dispensing medicines are being cut. NHS Employers have announced that from October 1st the fee per medicine dispensed will drop from £2.14 to £1.95, leading to a drop in income of around £850 per month for the average dispensing practice. But GP practices which dispense medicines are almost entirely in rural areas and 3.5million patients, particularly the elderly, rely on them so they can see their doctor and collect their drugs in one trip.

Dr David Baker, chief executive of the Dispensing Doctors Association, said 'if something does not happen to protect surgeries there is a risk practices will struggle hugely and certainly some will have to cut services. If we cannot cover our costs there is a major problem.'

Lifeboat crews in Kent carried out more rescues this summer than ever before, exceeding last year's figures by 3%, according to the RNLI.

[Lifeboats](#) were launched 195 times during June, July and August, compared to 189 the previous summer.

The busiest RNLI lifeboat stations were Ramsgate, with 42 launches, Whitstable with 38, and Dover with 35.

The [latest results from the Place Survey](#) reveal citizens' priorities for their local area, further information on the perceived quality of local services and more information about crime and anti-social behaviour.

Communities Secretary John Denham, said that the results demonstrated how important it was for councils to listen to local people and act on their behalf.

The survey revealed that the majority of local people were satisfied with local services although the survey also showed that people also want to see improvements in extra curricular activities for teenagers (46 per cent), street repairs (41 per cent), traffic congestion (36 per cent) and crime levels (31 per cent). In addition, over 60 per cent did not feel well informed about local services.

See also

[Place Survey 2008, England: Further results](#)

The Government is to recommend that local councils should make more [use of adoption charities to find permanent homes](#) for the thousands of children currently in care.

It is one of a series of recommendations aimed at promoting adoption as the best option for many children and responding to research which highlights that children given stable, permanent homes have higher chances of success in life.

The government also finds that council-run adoption units are struggling to match children with adoptive parents.

Care Services Minister Phil Hope has launched the [Big Care Debate](#) 'Face of Care'.

New research shows that the next generation of pensioners will use the latest technological developments and travel abroad when they retire.

A new online software package will encourage people to give their views on proposals for a radical reform of the care and support system, including the creation of a new National Care Service that is fairer, simpler and more affordable for everyone.

The online software will allow people to 'age' a photo of themselves and generate an image of what they might look like in old age.

See also

[The Big Care Debate website](#) and [Age a Photo of Yourself](#)

NHS Direct has announced that after falling for several weeks the [number of new swine flu cases has again risen](#), with an estimated 5,200 in the week to September 17.

A new report from the TaxPayers' Alliance (TPA) based on Freedom of Information requests, ['NHS machines utilisation of high-value equipment at NHS Trusts'](#) argues that many NHS Trusts are not adequately utilising expensive treatment and diagnostic equipment. TPA are concerned that with a crisis in the public finances and patients still forced to wait for important diagnostic and treatment procedures, the fact that many Trusts are under-utilising expensive and important facilities is serious, use the report to indicate the potential to increase the efficiency of many NHS Trusts to improve service to patients and value for taxpayers.

A survey by the Care Quality Commission [Mental health acute inpatient service users survey 2009](#) argues that many mental health patients in England are being let down on central aspects of hospital care, and that while patients are happy with some aspects of hospital care, they have significant concerns over the quality of service provided in many areas. The survey of more than 7,500 people recently discharged from 64 trusts highlighted particular issues around patient safety, medication, and access to counselling. Fewer than half of the patients surveyed said they "always" felt safe on the ward, with 16 % saying they 'did not feel safe at all'.

(See:

[2009 survey of mental health acute inpatient services](#)

[Too many mental health patients let down on key aspects of hospital care, says CQC](#)

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) have published several research publications, including:

- Characteristics, Outcomes and Meanings of Three Types of Permanent Placement - Adoption by Strangers, Adoption by Carer and Long-term Foster Care.
- Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2008.
- Where Next for Pupils Excluded from Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units?
- Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2008 - Technical Report.
- Children's Services Interventions Evaluation.
- Parental Experience of Services for Disabled Children - Qualitative Research (Phase 2): Exploring the Findings from the National Survey.

The reports are all available on the [DCSF research](#) web-page.

The Home Office have launched a new information campaign highlighting the risks and potential dangers of so-called 'legal highs' particularly when mixed with alcohol. The [FRANK Campaign](#) uses the theme that these are dangerous substances, and people are unaware of what they are taking, or the effects the substance might have on their body. The campaign, aimed at 18 to 24 year old clubbers, includes

- advertising in and outside clubs, in bars and in record shops
online targeted advertising that appears when people try to buy certain ' legal highs' online.
- adverts and articles on clubbing and student websites
working with the National Union of Student, distributing posters and flyers at student events.

- working with Mixmag magazine, advertising in the magazine and distributing posters and flyers.

(See:

['Legal highs' risks exposed](#)

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has published a paper which shows that when people are better informed about inequality and life on a low income, they are more supportive of measures to reduce poverty and inequality.

['Engaging Public Support for eradicating UK Poverty'](#) examines attitudes to poverty, what influences them and how to build public support for anti-poverty measures. It says that public awareness of the extent of poverty is limited, and that a long-term programme is needed to counter this.

Senior NHS managers have called for a pay freeze from 2011 together with a “fundamental review” of staff terms and conditions in the face of expected financial constraints.

The call came as NHS Employers was expected to tell the NHS pay review body the final year of the three year NHS pay agreement should be honoured, with the proviso that the NHS allocation for 2010-11 also stays as set.

Forthcoming Parliamentary Business

The House of Commons and House of Lords are on summer recess until Monday 12 October 2009.

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