In brief

NHS has new research director:

Professor Sir John Pattison has been appointed director of research and development at the UK Department of Health. Sir John, aged 56, is currently vice provost and professor of medical microbiology at University College London. He will take up his post in the autumn.

Israel issues new rules on detainees:

The facility to use chains and handcuffs to restrain security prisoners and detainees—mostly Palestinians but also Israelis—in hospital beds has been much reduced by new regulations issued by Israel's justice ministry. Under the new rules, physical restraints may be used only when other reasonable methods cannot prevent a risk of escape. The patient must be untied if chaining interferes with medical treatment.

UK MPs endorse report on care of the elderly:

The House of Commons health committee has endorsed the findings of the Royal Commission on Long Term Care of the Elderly (6 March, p 622). It is calling on the government to set up a national care commission and to provide free personal and nursing care for elderly people.

Liposuction deaths in New York:

Five deaths occurring after liposuction are among the 48 527 deaths reported to the office of the chief medical examiner of the city of New York between 1993 and 1998. Three patients died from hypotension and bradycardia, one from fluid overload, and one from deep vein thrombosis (*New England Journal of Medicine* 1999;340:1471-5).

AIDS becomes world's most deadly infectious disease: AIDS has overtaken tuberculosis and moved up to fourth place among all causes of death world wide, according to a report issued by the World Health Organisation. A decline in deaths attributed to tuberculosis accounted for AIDS moving up from last year's ranking of seventh place. The list is topped by heart disease, stroke, and acute respiratory infections.

Hungarians spurn private health insurance

Carl Kovac, *Budapest*

Hungarians apparently have yet to become enthusiastic about private hospitals and buying their own health insurance. Over the past six months, Providencia Austrian-Hungarian Insurance, under exclusive contract to Hungary's first private hospital, has sold only 100 policies covering health care at the facility.

It may be that many people

simply can't afford private health care. Most if not all of the hospital's services are out of reach for most Hungarians. The £3.7m (\$5.9m), 50 room, 100 bed hospital, located about 20 km west of Budapest, targets wealthy Hungarians and expatriates living there for extended periods of time and enjoying hefty corporate perks (*BMJ* 1998;316:1768).

Annual premiums range from 15000 to 30000 forints (£394–7880, \$629–12580), depending on the age of the policy holder. According to the national statistics bureau, the average monthly income in Hungary is about 50 000 forints (£130).

Laszlo Molnar, head of Prov-

idencia's health insurance department, said: "It's worse than we expected. The whole idea is new to this country. We've received free medical treatment for the past 40 or 50 years, so it will take time. Five or six months is not enough."

The hospital's backers are still betting on Hungary's anticipated economic growth and the emergence of private health insurance. The country now has only one healthcare insurer, the state social security system, and the government is currently studying health insurance reform. If it cuts back state subsidised health care, the private health insurance sector could grow. □

Welsh Assembly appoints health secretary

Roger Dobson, *Abergavenny*

Dealing with the health inequalities in Wales is top of the agenda for Jane Hutt, the newly appointed Welsh Assembly secretary for health and social services.

Labour, the biggest party in the assembly but lacking an overall majority, already pledged in the election run up that it would spend an extra £1bn (\$1.6bn) on the health service in Wales over the next three years.

The party is also committed to a having a "health supremo"

to eliminate bed blocking by speeding up the discharge of patients from hospital.

Ms Hutt, who has been a non-executive director of Cardiff Community Healthcare Trust for the past four years and has more than 20 years' experience in the voluntary sector, says health inequalities will be given priority.

Capital investment in the health service in Wales is also an area that will come under scrutiny: "We will be looking very carefully at how we can finance capital development, and that will be one of the first things I will do."

Also high on her agenda is the appointment of an independent children's commissioner for Wales to safeguard the interests of children. □

Doctors resist adopting clinical guidelines

Greg Basky, *Saskatoon, Canada*

On their own, education sessions about clinical practice guidelines do little to foster their adoption by doctors and other health providers.

A recently published Canadian study found that use of ankle radiography changed little in 10 hospitals where representatives had taken part in workshops on the Ottawa "ankle rules," a set of widely publicised, well validated guidelines designed to help doctors decide when to order x ray films of ankles. Previous studies have found that the rules can safely reduce ankle radiography by up to 26% without missing fractures or diminishing patient satisfaction.

Researchers found that doctors ordered as many x ray films after the workshops as they did before the sessions, even though they had rated the guidelines and workshops favourably and indicated that they intended to apply the guidelines. Five of the hospitals had also reported some prior use of the recommendations.

In the one hour education course attendees were taught about the validity and application of the ankle rules and were provided with education tools to help promote adoption of the guidelines. □

Jane Hutt is the new Welsh health secretary

JAMES DAVIES/WESTERN MAIL & ECHO