In brief

US lawsuit seeks contraceptive coverage: Planned Parenthood, a US voluntary family planning organisation, has filed a lawsuit in Seattle against the Bartell Drug Company, a drugstore chain in Washington state, claiming discrimination for failing to provide female employees with insurance coverage for contraception.

General anaesthesia to be banned in dental surgeries: From January 2002 any patients who need a general anaesthetic for dental work in England will have to be admitted to hospital. After the deaths of eight patients in the past four years the chief medical officer and chief dental officer have recommended that alternative methods of pain and anxiety control should be used to reduce further the use of general anaesthetics.

Romania is fighting anthrax: Romanian authorities are trying to stem an outbreak of anthrax, which has killed one man, infected nine others, and killed dozens of cattle in the Danube delta. The dead man was a farmer who ate contaminated pork. The epidemic has struck the town of Tulcea, a Danube port 260 km from Bucharest, and the port cities of Mahmudia and Murighiol, which have been quarantined.

Peers to inquire into human genetic databases: The science and technology committee of the UK House of Lords is to inquire into the present use of human genetic databases and the plans for their development.

Research in developing countries to be questioned: The Nuffield Council on Bioethics, based in London, has set up a working party to consider the ethical and social issues raised by healthcare related research in developing countries. Details can be accessed at www.nuffield.org/bioethics.

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Gynaecologist struck off the medical register

Clare Dyer *legal correspondent, BMJ*

Richard Neale, the gynaecologist who was allowed to practise for 14 years in Britain after losing his licence in Canada, was finally struck off the register in Britain this week.

His case raised new doubts about the ability of the General Medical Council to police the profession, after it emerged that the GMC knew of his record in Canada but took no action against him.

Although he had his operating privileges revoked, was sent for retraining in British Columbia, and was banned from practice in Ontario after a patient died, he was able to go on working in Britain. After he lied about his curriculum vitae the GMC even appointed him to investigate other doctors' fitness to practise.

Mr Neale, aged 52, was found guilty last week of 34 charges involving 12 British patients, including botched surgery, operating without consent, carrying out unnecessary procedures,

failing to monitor the condition of patients postoperatively, and duping a patient into paying for a private operation. The GMC found him guilty this week of serious professional misconduct and ordered him to be struck from the register forthwith.

The GMC was told by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario in 1985, when Mr Neale was working at Friarage Hospital in Northallerton, North Yorkshire, that he had been found guilty of incompetence and that his licence to practise medicine in Ontario had been revoked. The GMC decided not to take action against him, and, since its practice was to destroy files after three years if no action was taken, no record was kept.

The Ontario college took action after the death of Geraldine Krawchuk in childbirth at Oshawa Hospital in 1981. She experienced a ruptured uterus and amniotic fluid embolism

after Mr Neale administered oxytocin followed by prostaglandin.

Announcing the GMC's decision to strike him off, the chairman of the professional conduct committee, Professor Ken Hobbs, told him: "The findings of fact reveal many deficiencies in the standard of care you provided to patients as well as unprofessional and dishonest behaviour."

Mr Neale worked at Friarage Hospital from 1985 to 1995, leaving with a £100 000 (\$150 000) payoff and a favourable reference. The GMC is carrying out a separate investigation into the circumstances in which the reference was given. He went on to work in Leicester, London, and the Isle of Wight.

In a statement he said: "My family and I are totally devastated by this decision."

After the hearing the GMC's president, Sir Donald Irvine, described the Neale case as "shocking and disturbing." He added: "He has no place within the medical profession." He said that he could not defend the GMC procedures that allowed Mr Neale to practise in Britain despite his record in Canada. □

Women doctors earn \$63 000 less than male counterparts

Deborah Josefson *San Francisco*

Researchers at the University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public Health have found a persistent sex bias in doctors' salaries, with women earning on average 14% less than their male counterparts (*Annals of Internal Medicine* 2000;133:104-10).

The study, led by Dr Roberta Ness, focused predominantly on non-academic doctors and surveyed 232 male and 213 female internists practising in Pennsylvania. All had been out of medical school for 10 to 30 years, and 85% of the respondents were in their 40s and 50s.

The questionnaires completed by the doctors provided information on demographics; training; board certification;

Doctors from *ER*: Does Dr Mark Greene (left) earn \$63 000 more than Dr Kerry Weaver?

practice type and setting; hours worked per week; division of time between patient care, teaching, research, and administration; and faculty appointment and promotion. Information on marital status and leave from work was assessed.

Even after adjusting for differences in hours worked per

week, the investigators found a salary inequality, with women earning 14% less an hour than male counterparts.

Left unadjusted, the gap is 28% per hour less. On average, men earn \$63 000 a year more than women. □

Full story in News Extra at bmj.com