larities in the charging of private patients at the hospital.

Ms Caiach said she first raised her concerns in 1997 and made her complaints through all the normal lines of management up to chief executive. The health authority recommended that she refer the matter to the district auditor, who then involved the Audit Commission.

Ms Caiach says that the day she was interviewed by a commission representative last April a clinical complaint was filed against her, consisting of a general complaint and complaints relating to half a dozen cases.

A spokesman for the Carmarthenshire NHS Trust said: "We can confirm that Ms Caiach is currently undergoing a training programme... Training is being carried out with a view to Ms Caiach returning to work if it is satisfactorily completed."

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*

One in 50 Europeans are living with cancer or are in remission

Europe's first cancer prevalence study has shown that people in western European countries are more likely to be living with cancer than those in eastern Europe, partly because of high survival rates and longer life expectancy.

The Europrev study, published as two papers in this month's issue of the *Annals of Oncology* (2002;13:831-9, 840-65), included more than three million cancer patients in 45 registries. Rich nations such as Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, and Italy have the highest prevalence of cancer in Europe, whereas Poland, Estonia, Slovakia, and Slovenia have the lowest. England had the 10th highest rates out of 17 countries listed, and Scotland came in eighth place.

The study provided a snapshot of the number of people with a cancer diagnosis at a given moment in time—31 December 1992. As such, it reflects not just variation in the incidence of the disease but also the differences in national survival rates. Patients in eastern Europe tended to have more advanced cancers and more recent diagnoses.

The highest prevalence was found in Sweden, with 3046 cases of cancer per 100 000 members of the population. At the bottom of the table, Poland had a prevalence of just 1116 per 100 000. England's figure was 2012 per 100 000 and Scotland's 2098.

Owen Dyer *London*

R J Reynolds fined \$20m for advertising to young people

The leading US tobacco companies have had a losing streak of lawsuits on the west coast in the past month. On 6 June, Ronald Prager, a Supreme Court judge in San Diego, California, fined R J Reynolds \$20m (£14m; €21m) for violating the \$246bn multi-state master settlement agreement of 1998 by advertising to young people.

In the settlement, tobacco companies agreed not to target advertising at young people, not to use cartoons in their advertising—such as Joe Camel (*BMJ* 1996;313:1349 and *BMJ* 1994;308:677)—and not to advertise on outdoor billboards.

"Other companies scaled back their advertising to teenagers. R J Reynolds was the lone defendant, rigid and defiant," said Edward Sweda, senior attorney at the Tobacco Control Resource Center at Northeastern University School of Law in Boston.

The Californian attorney general's office, which filed the suit, said that R J Reynolds had violated the agreement by advertising in *Vibe*, *Spin*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Hot Rod*, magazines with almost as many teenage readers as adults. R J Reynolds is the United States's second largest tobacco company, with four of the 10 most popular brands—Camel, Winston, Salem, and Doral.

R J Reynolds said it would appeal on First Amendment grounds that it had been denied its right to free speech.

Janice Hopkins Tanne *New York*

More information can be accessed at www.tobacco.neu.edu

UK pill compensation claim collapses

Clare Dyer, legal correspondent *BMJ*

The compensation claim by more than 100 women over side effects of third generation contraceptive pills collapsed in the high court in London last week when the judge told lawyers he did not want to hear further evidence.

Last month Mr Justice Mackay finished hearing expert evidence and submissions on whether women taking the third generation pills were more than twice as likely to develop venous thromboembolism as those taking second generation pills.

Lawyers said his decision not to continue with the trial, which had been scheduled to last until early August, meant that the claimants had not proved their case to his satisfaction. Mr Mackay has not pronounced his findings on the key issue and, in theory, could change his mind before he delivers his written judgment in late July. But claimants' lawyers accepted that was unlikely and conceded that the case had almost certainly reached the end of the road. Martyn Day of Leigh, Day & Co, the law firm responsible for marshalling the scientific evidence on behalf of the women, said: "It's disappointing we've not been able to satisfy the judge that the relative risk was more than two. We can but hope he has a road to Damascus [conversion] between now and the end of July."

The case was brought against Organon Laboratories, Schering

Healthcare, and Wyeth, makers of third generation pills introduced in the 1980s as a supposedly safer alternative to the older pills. Studies eventually showed they carried a higher risk of venous thromboembolism, and the UK pharmaceutical watchdog, the Committee on Safety of Medicines, issued a warning in 1995, triggering a "pill scare."

Seven of the claims were on behalf of women, one of whom was only 16, who died after taking the pill. Another lost half her leg, a third had a severe stroke and is confined to a wheelchair, and a fourth was in a coma for weeks and lost half her bowel.

The women had to prove that the newer pills were more than twice as risky as the older ones to satisfy the judge that the chances were more than 50% that their injuries were caused by the pills. It was agreed that if they could not surmount that hurdle, they would lose. The outcome means that the judge will not go on to hear evidence about what happened to the individual women.

Debate has raged for seven years in medical journals over the relative risks of third versus second generation pills. Studies funded by the pharmaceutical industry showed little difference between the two, while independently funded studies showed a risk about twice as high for the newer pills. □

Mr Justice Mackay will deliver his written judgment in late July