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WHO increases pressure on China over bird flu

Breaking diplomatic protocol, the World Health Organization's new trouble shooter for pandemic influenza, Margaret Chan, has publicly scolded China for stalling on vital cooperation over the outbreak of bird flu. She has urged authorities to share specimens promptly and give the green light for a WHO led team to visit the country.

The appeal comes as new reports of cases of human strains in Indonesia of the deadly Avian A (H5N1) bird flu have heightened WHO's concerns about the looming threat of a global influenza pandemic.

"We are working with the government of China to impress upon them the importance of sharing these specimens and WHO would not depart from this position," Dr Chan, director for communicable disease surveillance, told reporters. "Understanding the evolution of the virus is very important for decision makers to make important public health decisions in terms of intervention; that is why we have always encouraged countries to share specimens."

WHO has been seeking specimens from China since late April after 5000-6000 birds died in western China. Since mid-June, the organisation has been waiting for the go ahead to a request to send in an international expert team.

John Zarocostas *Geneva*

Health committee warns of potential dangers of soya

Israeli manufacturers of soya products were rattled by the recommendation issued by the country's health ministry that consumption of soya products be limited in young children and avoided, if possible, in infants. After a year's work, a committee of experts also advised that adults who eat soya products do so in moderation, pending authoritative future studies.

Although research showing

Image of disabled children wins award

Alone in the Dark, part of a series of three photographs focusing on disabled children in institutional care in India by photographer Kurt Tong, was the winner of this year's Luis Valtueña International Humanitarian Photography Award.

The award, established in Spain in 1998 by Médicos del Mundo, part of the Médecins du Monde network, was set up as a tribute to humanitarian workers killed while working in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The winning series of photographs feature autistic children, who are tied up to prevent them from running away or moving. Mr Tong, a trained nurse and health visitor, told the *BMJ* that he wanted people to see the realities of institutional care and encourage them to find out more.

Deborah Cohen *BMJ*

The exhibition is at The Frontline Club, 13 Norfolk Place, London W2 1QJ until 5 September. See www.thefrontlineclub.com.

possible harm—a higher risk of cancer, male infertility, or other problems—from soya is based on animal or retrospective human studies, the committee of 13 issued recommendations based on the precautionary principle. Soya contains phytoestrogens that may have some of the effects of the human hormone if consumed in large quantities.

Soya consumption is high in Israel, and use of soya based baby formula is among the world's highest per capita. Nevertheless,

the ministry decided not to prohibit the sale of soya based formula without a doctor's prescription, which is already required in New Zealand and Australia.

Widespread soya use in Israel is due to a number of reasons, most prominently kosher food practices. Jewish law and tradition forbid the mixing of milk and meat products, dishes, and cutlery, and after eating meat individuals must wait some six hours before ingesting dairy foods.

Judy Siegel-Itzkovich *Jerusalem*

NHS errors led to more than 800 deaths

More than half a million errors are made in patient care in acute NHS hospitals each year, according to the National Patient Safety Agency. Most incidents resulted in no harm to the patient but in 840 cases the patient died, according to the agency's estimates.

Unintentional injury, such as slips and trips, was the most common incident reported, but drug errors, treatment, and problems with documents were a major problem.

The estimates were drawn from 85 342 incident reports via the National Reporting and Learning System between November 2003 and 31 March 2005. It represents the first public analysis of patient safety data in England and Wales.

Richard Thomson, the agency's director of epidemiology and research, pointed out that the figure of 840 deaths was much lower than previous estimates of 40 000 a year.

Peter Walsh, the chief executive of Action against Medical Accidents, said the rate of incidents involving patients' safety remained "alarmingly high" but added, "It is encouraging to see that incident reporting is increasing. It is imperative that NHS organisations become more open and honest when there has been an incident or omission in treatment which causes harm."

Rebecca Coombes *London*

The report, *Building a Memory: Preventing Harm, Reducing Risks and Improving Patient Safety*, is available at www.npsa.nhs.uk/health/resources/pso.

German private medical school to reform in face of criticism

Germany's first private university has announced that it will reform its medical school within the next three years, after severe