In brief

Foundation course begins for junior doctors: A new two year foundation course for qualified doctors in England began this week. It replaces the pre-registration house officer and the first year of a senior house officer job and puts the emphasis on patients' safety, communication skills, and team working. For details see www.mmc.nhs.uk.

UK doubles contribution to Global Fund: The Department for International Development has pledged £100m (\$178m; €144m) a year for 2006 and 2007, doubling the previous pledge of £51m a year for the Global Fund. The fund was created in 2002 to tackle HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria.

Avian flu vaccine on the cards: The US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases report that a vaccine for H5N1 avian flu developed by Sanofi-Pasteur has undergone preliminary tests which showed it produced a strong immune response and could be used on an emergency basis. The Vietnamese authorities have confirmed three more cases of H5N1 avian influenza, two of them fatal.

"Kylie effect" sparks increases in mammography: Screening appointments in Australia increased by 40% in the two weeks after the announcement that singer Kylie Minogue had breast cancer, according to an article published in the *Medical Journal of Australia*. In women aged 40-69 who had not previously been screened, bookings rose by 101%.

Agency gives all clear on NSAIDs: The European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products Committee on Medicinal Products for Human Use has recommended no changes in the advice to prescribers and patients on the use of non-selective NSAIDs after assessing available data on their cardiovascular safety. See www.emea.eu.int

News extra
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Korea pushes forward on cloning front

Jane Parry *Hong Kong*

A team led by Hwang Woo-suk, professor of the college of veterinary medicine at Seoul National University, has successfully cloned a dog using somatic cell nuclear transfer. The Afghan hound puppy, named Snuppy, was born on 24 April and was one of only two live births from the 1095 eggs that were harvested. The second dog died as a result of aspiration pneumonia after 22 days.

Professor Hwang's team collected 1500 eggs from 123 surrogates and transferred 1095 eggs back to the same dogs. The cloning process presented unique technical challenges because canine eggs are not mature at ovulation and continue the process of maturation in the oviduct. The research was published in *Nature* (2005;436:641).

"With more than 400 dog breeds displaying remarkable behavioural traits and diverse disease predilections, canine

nuclear transfer holds promise for both veterinary and human health discoveries," said Professor Hwang.

"Canine genome studies may have wide ranging applications and canine nuclear transfer may enable in vitro studies while reducing animal requirements. If canine embryonic stem cells are established, it would provide another therapeutic cloning model so that perhaps man's best friend might be among the first beneficiaries of immune-matched stem cell transplantation," he said.

Critics of Professor Hwang's work say that the low success rate severely detracts from the value of the research and that successful cloning of dogs may pave the way for human reproductive cloning. However, Professor Hwang says that efficiency will improve as the research continues and questions the validity of the latter claim on both ethical and scientific grounds.

"We are strongly against human reproductive cloning [and it] must be banned all over the world. The characteristics of domestic animals' oocytes are very different from those of humans. The reproductive physiology [and] morphology of the oocytes varies according to the

species. Due to this difference, it is almost impossible to clone humans at this stage of the research," he said.

In February this year Professor Hwang's team announced it has successfully cloned human embryos and extracted embryonic stem cells from them, and work is continuing in this area.

At the same time, a Korean biotechnology company, Maria Biotech, has been granted a licence to grow human stem cells from frozen embryos to produce specific cells or organs.

Whereas Professor Hwang was granted permission to do stem cell research on an exceptional basis, Maria Biotech's licence is the first to be granted since the country's bioethics laws came into force on 1 January 2005.

Park Se-pill, director of Maria Infertility Hospital Medical Institute and Maria Biotech, successfully isolated human stem cells from frozen embryos in 2000. "The Korean government has approved our application for research on growing human stem cells into specific cells or organs. Our research plan is to study animal model diseases such as Parkinson's disease, spinal cord injury, spinal open neural tube defects, and so on," said Dr Park. □

Simple measures can predict death in malnourished children

Susan Mayor *London*

Mid-upper arm circumference predicts risk of death in malnourished children as well as the currently recommended weight for height z score. A study in rural Kenya has found that the simple measure could provide a more practical way to identify children at high risk (*JAMA* 2005;294:591-7).

The study compared mid-upper arm circumference and visible severe wasting muscle loss among more than 8000 malnourished children in rural Kenya. In all, 4.4% (359) of children included in the study died while in the hospital. Mid-upper arm circumference and visible severe wasting proved to be as useful in predicting death as weight for height z score.

The lead author of the study, James Berkley, from Kenya Medical Institute Centre for Geo-

graphic Medicine Research, Kilifi, Kenya, said, "Even though severe malnutrition is a major cause of death among many hospitalised children in sub-Saharan Africa, the current recommended assessment method using weight for height to determine if a child is malnourished is not always feasible in these clinical settings."

Dr Berkley noted that recent reports have indicated problems in initially identifying severely malnourished children at admission to hospital. Calculating the weight for height z score depends on correctly recording weight and height values and then looking up a third value on a chart, which must be readily available.

"Height is difficult to measure accurately in children at any time but especially so in a

A doctor checks for signs of malnourishment by measuring arm circumference at a clinic in Mogadishu, Somalia

busy ward and when children are ill or distressed. The measurement of weight depends on the presence of properly calibrated and functioning scales, which often are not available," he said. See p369. □