bmj.com news roundup

Full versions of these stories are available at: bmj.com/content/vol332/issue7534/#NEWS_ROUNDUP

Religious women in the US are more likely to use screening

Women in the United States who attend religious services are more likely to have used health screening examinations than those who do not, but patterns differ substantially between different religions. Women who are evangelical Protestant Christians are less likely to use preventive health screening services than their Jewish or mainstream Christian counterparts, a study published online on 6 January 2006 in the *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* has shown (www.springerlink.com, doi: 10.1007/s10865-005-9035-2).

Jewish women, for example, were four times more likely to report having had cervical screening than evangelical Protestant Christians, while mainstream Protestant Christians were more likely than evangelical Protestants to report having had a mammogram.

"Religion has been a particularly neglected social factor in health research, and findings such as those shown here may compel healthcare workers and health researchers to pay more attention to religious involvement as a potentially significant correlate of health care utilisation," says the study.

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*

Cloning pioneer denies intentionally falsifying results

Disgraced Korean stem cell researcher Professor Hwang Woo-suk has apologised to the Korean people after a report by an investigating committee at Seoul National University into his work concluded that two landmark stem cell papers were based on faked data.

He denied, however, that he intentionally falsified the research and said that given six more months and a supply of human ova he could produce tailored embryonic stem cells.

On 11 January Professor

Poor patients in rich countries have fair access to GPs but not to specialists

Poorer patients in the world's wealthiest and healthiest countries have access to general practitioners equal to—and sometimes even better than—richer patients, but the same is not true of their access to specialists. These are the findings of a study of member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD; *CMAJ* 2006;174:177-83).

Of patients who had seen a doctor in the previous year, the fraction who had seen a GP was fairly stable at around 70-80%, except in Greece and Switzerland. But the fraction consulting a specialist showed much more variation, from as low as 20% (Ireland) and 30% (Denmark and Norway) to as high as 60% (Austria and France).

In countries where people often visited both GPs and specialists, such as Germany, Hungary, France, Belgium, and Austria, visit frequency was about 7-8 a year—twice the number in low use countries such as Finland, Switzerland, Denmark, and the United States (see graph). There was no data breaking visits down between GPs and specialists for the US.

David Spurgeon *Quebec*

Hwang appeared in public for the first time since his resignation on 23 December from his post as professor of the college of veterinary medicine at Seoul National University.

He admitted responsibility for the false data in the two published articles in the journal *Science* (2004;303:1669-74 and 2005;308:1777-83), for which he was lead author.

Professor Hwang reiterated his earlier claim that researchers at the MizMedi Hospital in Seoul had swapped his original stem cell lines for samples created using in vitro fertilisation.

Jane Parry *Hong Kong*

UK trusts urged to stamp out bullying and harassment

The health services' watchdog has reiterated its stance that bullying and harassment in the workplace will not be tolerated, after investigations of two trusts which were plagued by widespread complaints of abuse and low staff morale.

The UK Healthcare Commission investigated East Sussex Hospitals NHS Trust after complaints from staff and a local GP that grievances of bullying and

harassment were not being tackled appropriately or consistently.

The report found that although the number of complaints was no higher than at other similar trusts, poor handling of cases of bullying and harassment had led to low staff morale. Problems between staff took a long time to resolve, with some never being settled and staff felt discouraged from submitting formal complaints.

In another report, Devon Partnership NHS Trust was commended by the commission for its efforts to tackle bullying and harassment. In 2003, nearly a third of staff had reported abuse from colleagues. By the time of the report in 2005, however, the rate of complaints had fallen to about 10% of staff.

A direct hotline for staff to the chief executive has helped achieve the turnaround.

Zosia Kmietowicz *London*

The reports are available at www.healthcarecommission.org.uk.

Roma women were unlawfully sterilised

At least 50 Czech women were unlawfully sterilised and should be awarded financial compensation, a report from the country's ombudsman has said. The report follows a year long investigation into complaints filed by 87 mostly Roma women who claimed that they had been coerced into sterilisations (*BMJ* 2003;326:302).

In his findings, the ombudsman, Otakar Motejl, said that under Communist rule, social workers often offered a one-off payment equal to four times the average monthly salary to persuade Roma women against having more children.

"Women often did not realise what they were agreeing with their signature," Mr Motejl said. Even after the law was changed in 1991, doctors continued to persuade Roma women to have sterilisations, he said. He called on the women affected to launch official complaints against hospitals. "Financial compensation through the courts would bring this issue out into the open," he said.

Katka Krosnar *Prague*