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South Dakota abortion ban encourages other states

Plans by the US state of South Dakota to introduce a bill banning nearly all abortions have encouraged other states to follow suit.

Bans are under consideration by legislatures in Mississippi and Missouri and have been proposed in Ohio, Georgia, Tennessee, Michigan, and other states. Governor Mitt Romney of Massachusetts, who is considering a run for president in 2008, said that he would have signed the South Dakota bill with exceptions for rape and incest.

On 6 March, South Dakota's governor, Michael Rounds, signed a bill to ban abortions in the state unless they are necessary to save the life of the mother. Doctors who perform abortions face fines and jail terms.

The South Dakota law is a deliberate challenge to *Roe v Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision that made abortion legal in the United States. It is scheduled to go into effect on 1 July but will be held up by court challenges by Planned Parenthood and other groups. It may take three years for a challenge to reach the Supreme Court.

Janice Hopkins Tanne *New York*

Trusts to be graded by finances as well as quality of care

NHS trusts that overspend, even by only a few hundred pounds, will be heavily penalised under the annual "health check" that replaces the old star rating system this autumn.

The Healthcare Commission, the NHS's inspection body, announced this week that trusts will receive two separate ratings, one for quality of care and one for financial management. And, the commission made clear, overspending will not be tolerated.

The tough new approach follows growing concerns about the current state of the NHS's

Proportion of babies born in Europe after IVF varies 20-fold

More than 2% of babies born in some European countries are now the result of assisted reproductive technology. But there is an almost 20-fold variation in the proportion of babies born by such techniques in Europe, a review has found. Denmark has the highest proportion, at 3.9% of all births in 2001, and Latvia has the lowest, at 0.2% (*International Journal of Andrology* 2006;29:12-16).

The average number of treatments per million inhabitants in 2001 was 829, but this varied from 49 to 1923, with the United Kingdom the second lowest at 591.

One of the main aims of the review was to show that the decline in birth rates in Europe would have been greater without the contribution of fertility technology, said the authors.

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*

finances, with a record overspend predicted by the end of the financial year.

Under the health check, trusts will be rated on a four point scale, from weak to excellent. The commission's chief executive, Anna Walker, emphasised that any trust in deficit would find itself at the bottom of the scale and was likely to be subject to regular performance monitoring. It would also be barred from applying for foundation trust status. "It will face closer scrutiny from us because we will be watching like a hawk throughout the year for any impact on care of patients," she declared.

Andrew Cole *London*

For full details of the consultation see www.healthcarecommission.org.uk.

Antidepressants double suicidality in children, says FDA

Children and adolescents treated with antidepressants are nearly twice as likely to develop suicidality – suicidal thinking and behaviour – as similar children treated with placebo. This is the finding of a meta-analysis of 24 studies by the US Food and Drug Administration. The studies tested 4582 patients taking nine antidepressants versus placebo for depression and other disorders.

The FDA's analysis, published in this month's *Archives of General Psychiatry*, is the final review of data that were previously analysed but not released

by the FDA (2006;63:332-9). News of the secret data emerged in August 2004, and led to criticism of the FDA when it was learnt that Andrew Mosholder, an expert in the FDA's office of drug safety, concluded that antidepressants doubled the risk of suicidality in children, but he was not allowed to publish his findings (*BMJ* 2004;329:307, 7 Aug).

After excluding 260 of 427 events originally deemed to be potentially related to suicide, the agency still found that the risk ratio for suicidality for all drugs across all indications was 1.95 (95% confidence interval 1.28 to 2.98). The overall risk ratio for selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors in depression trials was 1.66 (1.02 to 2.68). No suicides were completed in any of these trials.

Jeanne Lenzer *New York*

Barts and the London redevelopment to go ahead

A £1bn (€1.5bn; \$1.7bn) deal to redevelop two of London's landmark hospitals, St Bartholomew's and the Royal London, has been approved by health secretary Patricia Hewitt.

The decision comes more than two months after Ms Hewitt threw into doubt the future of the hospitals, which together make up the Royal Hospitals NHS Trust, by announcing plans to review the redevelopment plan just after the trust had reached an agreement with contractors (*BMJ* 2006;332:196, 28 Jan).

The new buildings will be run in partnership with construction firm Skanska Innisfree, the builders of Swiss Re's "gherkin." The new accommodation will provide 1248 beds across two sites. This is the largest such private finance initiative scheme in Britain.

But news that 250 beds – representing two floors at the new Royal London building and one at Barts – will be left empty until the hospital trust can prove to the government that there is sufficient demand, has angered some critics.

Madeleine Brettingham *London*