In brief

Deaths rose during heat wave: A total of 15 187 people died in England and Wales during August's 10 day heat wave—2045 higher than the average for the same period in the last five years. The daily number of deaths peaked at 1691 on 11 August, but the average number of deaths each day is still higher in winter. Over the past five years an average of 1872 people died each day in January.

Disability charity to raise profile with doctors: The Community Fund has awarded £820 000 (\$1.4m; €1.2m) over three years to the charity Contact a Family to work with the Royal College of Paediatricians in training doctors to understand the problems that face families of disabled children. See www.cafamily.org.uk

Dominican doctors strike: About 6000 doctors in Santa Domingo in the Dominican Republic walked off the job last month to demand pay increases. The Dominican Medical Association, which is demanding a 100% salary increase and regular medical supplies to hospitals, described the government's offer of a 9.5% increase as "laughable" and "insignificant."

Ombudsman rules on children with HIV: Hungary's educational rights ombudsman has ruled that children infected with HIV or hepatitis C cannot be prevented from attending school. The ruling came after an HIV positive student was barred from attending secondary school and a child with hepatitis C was forced to transfer to another primary school.

Deal on infectious disease research announced: The University of Liverpool has signed a research agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in Atlanta, into work on the control of infectious and parasitic diseases. The move will speed up the development of new vaccines and enable the centres to work with new biotechnology businesses at the university.

Labour leaders are defeated over foundation hospitals

Owen Dyer *London*

The government's plans for foundation hospitals suffered a major setback last week when delegates at the Labour party conference in Bournemouth voted to reject the policy, but the health secretary, John Reid, said he would not be deterred from pushing the Health and Social Care Bill through parliament.

A motion by the public services union Unison said the proposed reforms would "fragment the [NHS], widen inequalities, and undermine the collaborative principles now being re-established." It also said the government was not honouring its 1997 manifesto promise to end the internal market in the NHS.

The motion was passed by a show of hands, with a clear enough margin that no card vote was needed.

A second motion put forward by government loyalists that praised "devolution" in the NHS while condemning privatisation was defeated by 55% to 40% after

a card vote. The defeat came despite an emotive speech by John Reid, who said the government was leading "the most extraordinary effort in history to help ordinary people out of pain."

"If your child or your mother was in pain," he asked rhetorically, "and the means to relieve it quicker were available free at the

point of need, would you refuse them it? I wouldn't."

Party members have voted against the prime minister's policy on two previous occasions in the Blair era, but this was the first time legislation that is currently before parliament has been rejected by the conference. This week the bill goes into committee stage in the House of Lords, and some opponents predict that the government will trim its content to smooth its passage. □

See News Extra at bmj.com

John Reid: The government is leading "the most extraordinary effort in history to help people out of pain"

Research should be accessible to all, says Wellcome Trust

Katherine Burke *London*

Everyone should have free internet access to the full text of high quality, peer reviewed articles as soon as the paper version is published, says the UK's top biomedical research charity.

In a position statement released last week the Wellcome Trust called for a rethink of the £22bn (\$37bn; €32bn) scientific publishing market, to ensure that progress in research and the public good are not neglected at the expense of commercial interests.

According to the trust the average cost of a medical journal rose 184% in the decade to 2000—with UK journals showing especially steep price hikes—despite unit costs remaining stable over the same period.

The report, by economic analysts SQL, points out that journal bundling deals—in which subscribers have to pay for access to a package of online journals for several years—may suit publishers' pockets but often don't meet the needs of the libraries that subscribe to them and result in niche periodicals losing circulation.

And open access initiatives such as PubMed Central, launched in February 2000, fail to go far enough, says the trust, because links and content are months behind the paper version of the journals. Moreover, online searchable archives such as BioMed Central and Stanford University's HighWire Press give free access only to some articles, depending on the subscription policies of individual societies and publishers.

The Wellcome Trust believes that online initiatives that allow readers to make and distribute electronic copies of papers as soon as they are published or print off a few copies for personal study could increase the pace

of scientific discovery. Publishing the results of the human genome project on the web enabled "vast numbers" of researchers in more than 100 countries to access the information, said the trust's director, Dr Mark Walport.

The trust hopes that researchers may be able to access structural genomic information online through the European information platform E-BioSci—the prototype for which was launched at the end of August (www.e-biosci.org).

One solution supported by the trust is the creation of open access journals, such as the online biology journal that will be launched by the Public Library of Science next week (www.publiclibraryofscience.org). The journal will be funded by the authors rather than through readers' subscriptions, but it is hoped that costs will pass back to research funders (*BMJ* 2003;326:11). □

An Economic Analysis of Scientific Research Publishing is accessible at www.wellcome.ac.uk