St Bartholomew's saved in London plan

John Warden, *London*

Britain's oldest hospital, St Bartholomew's in London, has been saved from closure by a Labour government, which has endorsed the latest review of health services in London and reversed the conclusions of the previous Conservative administration after the 1992 Tomlinson review.

St Bartholomew's is to become a specialist unit for cardiac and oncology services, and its planned replacement, a new Royal London Hospital at Whitechapel, will be scaled down from 1200 to 900 beds.

The survival of Bart's is a rare example of government sentiment prevailing over savings after a period of Cabinet infighting. The Treasury opposed the reprieve on cost grounds but was overruled by the personal intervention of the prime minister, Tony Blair, who is on record as saying that services at the hospital should be "preserved for ever." He backed the health secretary, Frank Dobson—an inner London MP—who had declared when he was appointed last May that he did not want a plaque on the wall of St Bartholomew's stating: "Founded by Rahere 1123, closed by Frank Dobson 1997."

He initiated a review—there have been well over 20 in London's health care this century—under Professor Sir Leslie Turnberg, past president of the Royal College of Physicians, which duly recommended retain-

ing St Bartholomew's. In accepting the report, Mr Dobson admitted to the House of Commons that the symbolism, history, and tradition of St Bartholomew's had influenced his decision.

But although the immediate crisis has passed, doubts remain whether the hospital will reach its 10th century. The Turnberg report states that preserving it is the more expensive option, and will need to be kept under review. Critics say the reprieve will be at the expense of primary health, mental health, and community services, although Mr Dobson announced an extra £140m for this purpose. The 80 page Turnberg report describes health services in London as woeful and makes numerous recommendations for improvement, including an increase in the number of GPs.

The key departure of the

Turnberg review from the earlier Tomlinson report is to dispute that London has too many acute hospital beds, which was one reason for planning to close St Bartholomew's. The Turnberg report now says that London probably has fewer beds than the average, and further bed closures should not be planned.

The switch of services from Guy's Hospital to St Thomas's Hospital will proceed, though on a more limited scale than was planned. New hospitals in the pipeline for Greenwich, Euston, and Oldchurch are approved, but Queen Mary's Hospital, Roehampton, will be downgraded to a community hospital. To ensure a London-wide strategy for health, the government accepts that there should be a single NHS regional office for the capital. Ray Pett, chief executive of the Royal Hospitals NHS Trust, which runs four hospitals including St Bartholomew's, welcomed the decision but warned that the long term problems of sustaining services both clinically and financially needed to be addressed. □

The symbolism and tradition of Bart's helped win its reprieve

Germany rejects ban on smoking in public

Sandra Goldbeck-Wood, *BMJ*

The German parliament has rejected a bill proposing to ban smoking in public buildings, workplaces, and public transport, after an emotional debate last week. The controversial bill, brought before parliament by a 150-strong cross party group of MPs, was rejected in a free vote by 336 to 256.

Dr Karsten Vilmar, president of the German Doctors' Chamber, said that this showed that some members of parliament had got their priorities wrong. Legislation is the only way to protect non-smokers in the workplace, he argued, saying, "It's a shame that there is no majority for common sense." But although the doctors' chamber strongly supported the bill, another doctors' organisation, the Hartmannbund, which represents GPs and other self employed doctors, opposed it.

Health minister Dr Horst Seehofer also opposed the introduction of the antismoking bill,

arguing that protection for non-smokers should not take place "in the shape of a new bureaucratic diktat created by the legislature." Instead, the emphasis should be on prevention and attempts to reduce the number of smokers, argued Dr Seehofer.

But according to the German Lung Foundation, only one German smoker in five succeeds in giving up, and Germany has one of the highest smoking rates in Europe, with over 40% of the workforce smoking. Germany is 16th in the World Health Organisation's league tables of cigarette consumption per head. □

Philippines passes antismoking laws

Claire Wallerstein, *Manila*

Antismoking laws passed last week in the Philippines after a five year struggle are "too little, too late" to stub out the country's addiction to cigarettes, health officials have warned. The country's new legislation leaves Cambodia as the only country in the Western Pacific region still without any antismoking law.

Once ratified by the president, Fidel Ramos, the new bill will outlaw all advertising of cigarettes in print and broadcast media within four years, ban smoking in public, and punish those who sell cigarettes to children. It will also provide money to reimburse Filipino tobacco farmers, who currently produce 70 billion cigarettes a year. Maximum punishments for violators will be a prison term of six years or a fine of 100 000 pesos (£1540; \$2500).

These seemingly strict measures, however, have already attracted strong criticism from prominent antismoking campaigners in a country where 73% of adults and 56% of children are regular smokers.

Dr Daniel Tan of the University of the East in Manila, who consulted with the senate health committee on the bill, said: "It has no teeth because some crucial Congressmen forced us to compromise to appease their tobacco growing constituents. For a start I'm very disappointed that we must wait for four years before the advertising ban begins. Even after the four year period is up, the wording of the bill means the tobacco companies will still be able to promote their non-tobacco merchandise, such as holidays and clothes."

Dr Tan doubts that the government will have the political will to enforce the more difficult aspects of the bill—such as establishing no-smoking areas in public places. And he has particular doubts about the section that makes it illegal to sell cigarettes to children—because most cigarette sellers in the country are themselves poor youngsters, who wander the streets selling tobacco and sweets to passing motorists. □