In brief

WHO launches "3 by 5"

strategy: The World Health Organization and UNAIDS (the joint UN programme on HIV and AIDS) this week launched their "3 by 5" strategy to treat three million people with AIDS by 2005. WHO also announced it is adding three new generic products for the first line treatment of AIDS to its list of drugs meeting its standards of quality, safety, and efficacy. The products are fixed dose, triple combinations containing lamivudine, stavudine, and nevirapine (8 November, p 1067).

India to provide free AIDS

drugs to 100 000: India's health ministry has announced a new initiative to supply free antiretrovirals to 100 000 people infected with HIV from April next year. The drugs will be available in six states with high prevalence of HIV: Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Manipur, Nagaland, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka.

Dutch government restricts

abnormality test: Despite opposition from the medical profession the Dutch government is to retain a 36 year age limit for routine testing of pregnant women for Down's syndrome and other chromosomal abnormalities. Junior health minister Clémence Ross has rejected scientific advice that all pregnant women should be offered the triple blood test.

New patients' bodies begin

work: Patient and public involvement forums took over from community health councils in monitoring and reviewing health services from the patient's perspective from 1 December. For more information see www.doh.gsi.gov.uk/involvingpatients

E coli resistance rises:

The European antimicrobial resistance surveillance system is warning of a worrying trend in the rise of resistant *Escherichia coli*. The system, which monitors data on several major pathogens from 700 laboratories in 28 countries, has seen a "marked and consistent" rise in fluoroquinolone resistance in *E. coli*. The system's 2002 annual report is available at www.earss.rivm.nl

Mental health bill will be subject to pre-legislative scrutiny

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*

A revised mental health bill for England and Wales is to be brought forward as soon as possible and will be subject to pre-legislative scrutiny.

The government also plans to monitor the use of compulsion, an area of the draft bill published last year that proved highly controversial (*BMJ* 2003;326:406-7).

The bill, described as the first major overhaul relating to mental health since the 1950s, was said to remove a loophole that allowed people with dangerous and severe personality disorders to avoid treatment by arguing that they got no benefit from it. But critics of the draft bill said that it would mean that many people with incurable personali-

ty disorders could be locked up indefinitely in secure mental hospitals, without the need for evidence that they had committed a crime.

The bill was expected to be brought to the last parliamentary session, but it was not. Now the health secretary, John Reid, says that the government is fully committed to reforming mental health legislation.

He said, "We must make significant improvements to patient safeguards, provide a modern framework of legislation in line with modern patterns of care and treatment and human rights law, and protect public safety by enabling patients to get the right treatment at the right time."

New bill will regulate the retention of tissue

Clare Dyer *legal correspondent, BMJ*

The Human Tissue Bill will make consent "the fundamental principle underpinning the lawful removal, retention and use of human bodies, body parts, organs and tissue."

The bill comes after the discovery—during the inquiry into

high mortality among babies undergoing heart surgery at Bristol Royal Infirmary—that children's organs and tissue were routinely retained without the consent or knowledge of their families.

It later emerged that the practice was also common at the Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital in Alder Hey. At both hospitals organs were removed and stored without parents' knowledge and children's bodies were buried with major organs missing.

The bill would create an authority to regulate transplantation and would also introduce regulation of postmortem exam-

"In order to achieve our objectives it will be vital to get the legislation right. To that end it is important that a strong part is played by parliament in scrutinising the bill."

Dr Tony Zigmond, vice president of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, said there were still concerns: "We hope that the provisions in the new legislation will be very significantly changed, particularly those on the definition of mental disorder and the criteria for compulsion."

The chief executive of MIND (a mental health charity), Richard Brook, said: "We welcome the commitment to put the proposed bill before pre-legislative scrutiny. Unless the needs and concerns of people with mental health problems are properly taken into account in this process, and reflected in any subsequent legislation, they [legislators] will once more be neglecting their most important stakeholders." □

inations and of the retention of tissue for education and research.

The Department of Health said the aim of the bill was to achieve a balance between the rights and expectations of patients and families and the importance of research, education, and training.

The chief medical officer, Liam Donaldson, and the chairman of the Bristol inquiry, Ian Kennedy, had called for reform of the law.

The reform was welcomed by doctors' organisations and by families from Liverpool and Bristol whose children's organs were retained without their knowledge.

BMA chairman James Johnson said: "We are in favour of proposals to regulate the use of human tissues after death. The public needs reassurance that strict guidelines and procedures govern the use of tissues that are used for donation or research purposes."

Cancer Research UK was "delighted" that the bill was included in the next parliamentary programme. Its chief executive, Alex Markham, said: "A bill on human tissues will provide a consistent legal framework for all issues relating to the taking, storage, and use of human organs and tissues." □

Candles at church service representing the children whose organs were retained by Alder Hey Children's Hospital