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Trials of two microbicides to be launched in Africa

Large scale, phase III clinical trials of two promising HIV microbicides will begin in Africa in the second half of this year, British researchers told a conference in London this week.

A total of 12 000 women in South Africa, Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda, and Cameroon will take part in the three year studies, investigators from Imperial College London and the Medical Research Council said at the meeting, Microbicides 2004.

About 60 microbicide gels or creams are being developed at the moment, 14 of which are in the early phases of testing in humans. The aim of the approach is to reduce the risk of vaginal or anal transmission of the virus by killing or inactivating it, creating a barrier to mucosal cells or preventing the infection taking hold after it has entered the body.

The clinical trials announced this week will focus on two preparations being tested under Britain's microbicides development programme, jointly backed by the Department for International Development, the Medical Research Council, and Imperial College London. They are dextrin sulphate, from the UK firm ML Laboratories, and PRO-2000 gel, a synthetic naphthalene sulphonate polymer from the US company Indevus Pharmaceuticals.

Stephen Pincock *London*

Surgeon wins £815 000 from BMA in race case

An Indian surgeon who blames racism for blocking his career in the NHS has won nearly £1m (\$1.8m; €1.5m) in damages, costs, and interest from the BMA for failing to support him in bringing race discrimination claims.

The BMA has lost an appeal against an employment tribunal ruling that it was guilty of indirect race discrimination against Rajendra Chaudhary and must pay him a record £815 000. With

Three quarters of young UK adults risk skin cancer by seeking sunbath

Nearly three quarters of young adults in the United Kingdom are increasing their risk of skin cancer by wanting to be suntanned, a survey reported this week.

The survey of more than 1800 adults aged over 16 showed that the younger age group (16 to 24 year olds) were more likely to want to get a suntan than older people. Nearly half of the whole group surveyed liked or aimed to get a suntan when they went on holiday, but this increased to 71% of 16 to 24 year olds.

Reporting the findings, Dr Charlotte Proby, consultant dermatologist and senior lecturer at the Cancer Research UK Skin Tumour Laboratory at Barts and the London, Queen Mary's School of Medicine, London, said: "Unless young people change their habits and learn to protect themselves properly in the sun we could be heading for a skin cancer time bomb."

Susan Mayor *London*

More information on the SunSmart campaign is available at www.sunsmart.org.uk

interest since the tribunal ruling nearly two years ago, the final figure is just under £1m.

The Employment Appeal Tribunal upheld the Manchester tribunal's finding that the BMA, though willing to support members in racism claims against employers, was not prepared to "take on" the royal colleges, their specialty advisory committees, the postgraduate deans, or the specialist training authority.

The appeal tribunal agreed that, while the association was not guilty of direct race discrimination, this stance amounted to indirect discrimination because a disproportionate number of Asian members were affected.

Mr Chaudhary, who came to the United Kingdom after qualifying in India, sought the BMA's help in bringing claims against

the Royal College of Surgeons (RCS), the postgraduate dean for Wessex, the specialty advisory committee for urology of the RCS, and the specialist training authority.

The BMA's secretary, Jeremy Strachan, said: "A preliminary review of the [Employment Appeal Tribunal] judgment suggests there may be good grounds for a further appeal to the Court of Appeal. Since the original tribunal decision, we have supported Mr Chaudhary against various NHS authorities on three racial discrimination appeals and an employment tribunal at a cost of over £150 000." BMA members with work related discrimination claims are now referred to an external firm of solicitors, he added.

Clare Dyer *legal correspondent, BMJ*

US healthcare lobbyists outspend other pressure groups

Healthcare lobbyists spent \$237m (£130m; €195m), more than any other industry, to influence US senators and representatives, the White House, and federal agencies in 2000, says an article in the *American Journal of Medicine* (2004;116:474-7).

Drug companies and medical supply companies together spent \$96m. Physicians and other health professionals, such as nurses, spent \$46m, hospitals and nursing homes \$40m, health insurance and managed care companies \$31m, and disease advocacy and public health organisations spent \$12m. During the study period, 1997-2000, spending on lobbying by health professionals grew by only 10% compared with 26% by other organisations.

An editorial in the same issue (pp 496-7) by Dr Margot Kushel and Andrew Bindman of the University of California, San Francisco, says: "Health policy is at risk of being unduly influenced by special interest groups that can bring the most financial resources to the table" and suggests that this is "alarming for physicians."

Janice Hopkins Tanne *New York*

Data collection is poor because staff don't see the point

Too few doctors and nurses understand the reasons why collecting information on how their hospital or department is performing matters, says a report from the public spending watchdog, the Audit Commission.

Better understanding by frontline staff of what auditors are trying to achieve through the collection of data in the NHS, could improve its quality, says the Audit Commission in its latest report.

Zosia Kmietowicz *London*

Information and Data Quality in the NHS is available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk