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US universities get round regulations on stem cell research

Harvard University is the biggest, newest player to get around US government regulations saying that institutions that receive federal funding can carry out stem cell research only on 60 established stem cell lines. Harvard, together with other organisations, is circumventing the regulations by establishing institutions that use private funding for the research.

Harvard has established an institute involving 14 of its schools and hospitals and nearly 100 researchers and scientists. The university aims to raise \$100m (£56m; €84m) for the institute.

Federal funding for stem cell research in the United States has been restricted since 2001, when President Bush said he was limiting research to 60 stem cell lines from embryos that had already been destroyed.

He said, "Embryonic stem cell research is at the leading edge of a series of moral hazards." Only 18 lines are now available for studies. Research with private funds can continue. Janice Hopkins Tanne *New York*

NHS meets financial targets, but some trusts could do better

The NHS in England met its financial targets last year, but 71 NHS trusts exceeded their budgets and some are in serious financial difficulty, according to the government's senior accountant.

A total of £53.5bn (\$95bn, €79bn) was spent by 607 individual NHS organisations (28 strategic health authorities, 304 primary care trusts, and 275 NHS trusts). Taken together they underspent their budgets by £96m, or 0.18% of total expenditure.

The Department of Health "met its target of ensuring that financial balance was achieved in aggregate," writes John Bourn,

UK government endorses national exercise regimen

The British government's top medical adviser has recommended that adults take 30 minutes of physical activity, five days a week, to maintain general health and reduce their risk of developing cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer.

Professor Liam Donaldson, the chief medical officer, made the recommendation in a new report, *At Least Five a Week*, which gathers medical evidence on the impact of physical activity and health.

The two key recommendations in the report are that adults do at least 30 minutes a day of moderate intensity activity on five or more days a week and that children and young people do at least 60 minutes every day. Examples of moderate physical activity include walking, playing golf, mowing the lawn, painting and decorating, and cycling. Stephen Pincock *London*

At Least Five a Week: Evidence on the Impact of Physical Activity and its Relationship to Health is accessible at www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/

comptroller and auditor general, in the National Audit Office's report on NHS accounts for 2002-3.

But he was concerned by the variation in financial performance and the large deficits incurred by some NHS bodies.

The audit singled out North Bristol NHS Trust for particular criticism: "The example of North Bristol NHS Trust illustrates the impact of poor financial management and corporate governance procedures. In 2002-3, the Trust reported a deficit of £44.6m, the largest deficit ever incurred by an NHS organisation."

Steve Webster, director of finance at North Bristol NHS Trust, said the trust turned the corner the following year. Owen Dyer *London*

NHS (England) Summarised Accounts 2002-2003 can be accessed at www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports

EU trials database is criticised for lack of openness

Experts have warned that the European Union's decision to restrict access to a new clinical trials database to government regulatory authorities will make it more difficult to decide whether commonly used treatments are effective.

Dr Gerd Antes, head of the German Cochrane centre and spokesman for the German Network for Evidence Based Medicine, said that the information on the new European clinical trials database (Eudract) should be made available to the general public as well as to medical researchers.

"Making clinical trial registers available to the public is a scientific, economic, and ethical duty,"

he told the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*.

Under the European clinical trials directive, which came into force on 1 May, all clinical trials on medicinal products for human use that take place in the 25 member states of the European Union have to be registered.

However, the information submitted will be confidential: only national and EU regulatory authorities as well as the European Commission will be able to find out what trials are going on, when, and where.

Jane Burgermeister *Vienna*

Open access could reduce cost of scientific publishing

Making scientific research available free on the internet rather than through subscription journals could reduce the cost of publishing research by up to 30%, a report published this week says.

The report indicates that an open access model of scientific publishing—in which authors of a research paper pay for their research to be peer reviewed and made available on the web free of charge to readers—is economically viable.

It was based on a study by the Wellcome Trust, a research funding charity, that analysed the costs of publishing scientific, technical, and medical research articles by comparing two options: the "subscriber pays" model, in which readers pay for printed journals or online access, and the "author pays" model. Estimates of cost were based on discussions with senior staff across a range of journals and online publishing organisations, as well as a literature review.

The analysis found that a £1100 (\$1950; €1630) payment by authors would allow a workable, high quality, and sustainable publishing model. This compared with an average cost of £1500 per paper for papers published under the traditional system.

Susan Mayor *London*

Costs and Business Models in Scientific Research Publishing is accessible at www.wellcome.ac.uk/publications