In brief

Mother calls for inquiry: The mother of a terminally ill baby who was at the centre of a high profile legal battle called for an investigation into the care he received just before his death last week. She claimed he was "not given every chance" because medical staff did not inject him with adrenaline (epinephrine). Two NHS trusts had taken the case to the High Court last month after Ruth Winston-Jones disagreed with doctors' opinions that her baby Luke, who had Edwards' syndrome, should not be subjected to aggressive treatment if his condition deteriorated (*BMJ* 2004;329:995, 30 Oct).

Canadian group recommends flu vaccine for everyone: Canada's task force on preventive health care has recommended influenza vaccination for all healthy adults and children older than 6 months of age to prevent illness and death in high risk groups.

NHS files claim for £94m in generic price fixing case: The NHS in England has filed a formal assessment of £69m (\$127m; €98m) in damages plus interest of £25m against five companies alleged to have fixed the price of generic ranitidine in ongoing proceedings in the High Court, Chancery Division (*BMJ* 2004;329:12).

American drugs to be tracked: The US Food and Drug Administration is set to approve drug company plans to insert radio antennae into the labels of medicine bottles dispatched to pharmacists. The labels will emit a number when prompted by a radio signal, making it easier to track the product and overcome problems with counterfeit drugs.

Lawyers question distance between beds in new hospital: A newly built private finance initiative hospital in London faces legal challenge over the space it has allowed between beds. Although NHS Estates guidance stipulates 3.6 m, the University College Hospital, due to open next year, gives only 2.7 m.

Russia fails to ban drinking in public despite soaring alcoholism

Andrew Osborn *Moscow*

An unprecedented drive to curb the post-Soviet boom in drinking on Russia's streets—a move designed to stamp out soaring levels of child alcoholism—has been unexpectedly derailed.

Beer is regarded as a soft drink by many Russians, and the country's brewers have enjoyed huge success since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, with beer supplanting vodka as the tippable of choice among many young Russians.

Priced at little more than 40p (\$0.74; €0.57) a bottle and regarded as little more than a potent form of lemonade, it is not uncommon to see children as young as 11 drinking beer after school with their friends and to see commuters swigging bottles of beer on Moscow's underground in the mornings.

The upper house of Russia's parliament has struck down a bill outlawing drinking alcohol in public places

In practice, there is no age limit.

The Russian parliament, however, which is increasingly keen to sweep away many of the excesses which have crept into Russian society in the past 13 years, had decided that enough was enough.

The lower house repeatedly and overwhelmingly backed a bill that would have banned drinking beer in public—on the street, in sports' stadiums, in parks, on public transport, in schools, and in hospitals.

The sale of beer to children younger than 18 would also have

been outlawed and fines of £2 imposed on transgressors. The ban was supposed to accompany tough new restrictions on the advertising of beer on television, which are due to come into force next year.

The Federation Council or upper house, however, has unexpectedly struck down the bill demanding that it be substantially diluted because it is too severe. Observers expect that street drinking will not now be outlawed, and that more specific measures to combat child alcoholism will remain in place. □

Scotland to ban smoking in enclosed public places

Bryan Christie *Edinburgh*

Scotland is to become the first country in the United Kingdom to ban smoking in enclosed public places such as bars and restaurants in a move that will increase pressure on England, Wales, and Northern Ireland to follow suit.

The ban, which is scheduled to be introduced in spring 2006, has been welcomed by medical charities, royal colleges, and health professionals. It will carry maximum fines of £2500 (\$4617; €3567) for businesses and £1000 for individual smokers who persistently flout the new law.

Although the definition of an enclosed public place has still to be decided, few exemptions are expected to the ban, which will cover pubs, clubs, restaurants, private members' clubs, and even dedicated smoking rooms at work. Scotland's first minister,

Jack McConnell, said it would amount to one of the most far-reaching antismoking laws in the world.

However, the Scottish licensed trade is considering mounting a legal challenge to the proposed legislation, warning that it could force up to a quarter of bars to close, with the loss of thousands of jobs.

Their arguments have been rejected by health campaigners, who have said that any economic impact on the licensed trade will be far outweighed by the health benefits of a ban. Professor Alex Markham, chief executive of Cancer Research UK, said: "Huge numbers of lives will be saved as a result of this legislation, and many smokers desperate for the support to give up will have a golden opportunity to quit successfully."

The decision to introduce a ban in Scotland has encouraged antismoking groups in the rest of the United Kingdom. Ministers in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland are being urged to follow Scotland's lead. The Welsh Assembly has already voted in favour of a ban but lacks the power to implement one. The BMA in Wales is now considering petitioning the UK parliament to give the assembly the right to outlaw smoking in public places.

Pressure is also being applied to the secretary of state for health at Westminster, John Reid, himself a Scot. Dr Vivienne Nathanson, the BMA's head of science and ethics, said: "The BMA congratulates Scottish politicians for listening to the evidence on second hand smoke, putting the health of their citizens first, and having the courage to introduce a ban. We really hope that John Reid will be influenced by his fellow Scots and show similar leadership when he releases the forthcoming white paper on public health for England." □