In brief

WHO warns against sunbeds:

Sunbeds should never be used by people aged under 18 or people who tend to freckle, warns the World Health Organization. The high intensity ultraviolet output of the machines is many times higher than the midday sun in most countries, and exposure to sunburn as a child increases the risk of melanoma, it says. See www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs287/en/

Endoscopy nurses could do greater range of testing:

Specialist endoscopy nurses could take over much of the diagnostic testing currently being carried out by doctors, says the British Society of Gastroenterology. It suggests doubling the number of these nurses available to do routine investigations and cancer screening.

Dutch doctors are now more cautious over euthanasia:

A study by the Dutch Medical Association claims that doctors in the Netherlands go further than the six original legal requirements when carrying out euthanasia. Various judgments since 1980 have required that doctors should also "resist improper pressure," "keep professional distance," and "communicate with the patient's family and other carers."

Possible measles outbreak in Nigeria:

The World Health Organization has received reports of 1118 cases of acute fever and rash, including 76 deaths, in Adamawa state, northern Nigeria, as of 28 February 2005. The cases have been clinically diagnosed as measles, but no laboratory confirmation has yet been made. Other states, including Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, and Kebbi, have all reported outbreaks of measles.

UK has paid out vaccine damages worth £3.5m (\$6.7m; €5.1m): Since 1997 the British government has paid out £100 000 each to 35 people left disabled after vaccinations. In total, 917 payments have been made to people under the vaccine damage payment scheme, introduced in 1979.

HIV treatment should be free for everyone in Britain, MPs say

Faye van Emmerik *London*

HIV should be reclassified as a sexually transmitted infection so that treatment would be free to all patients, as it is for other such infections, MPs said this week.

A report on sexual health and HIV services by the House of Commons health select committee said people entitled to HIV treatment were being refused it because doctors were confused over who was eligible under last year's tightening up of the 12 month residency rule. This rule says that illegal immigrants, failed asylum seekers, visa overstayers, and other illegal residents are no longer entitled to free care in the NHS for HIV

and AIDS even if they have been in the United Kingdom for 12 months.

In evidence to the committee doctors reported feeling compromised by having to play a "gatekeeper" role in determining a patient's eligibility.

Dr David Asboe, a consultant in genitourinary medicine at the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital, said: "It is clear that the General Medical Council says you must make the primary care of the patient your first concern. That is in direct conflict with some of these decisions that are needing to be made."

MPs were astonished at the Department of Health's admission that it had not costed the known benefits of the new rules and did not know how many people they applied to. Their report said: "We have received powerful evidence that it would be more cost effective to provide free HIV treatment to all."

The committee also reported that numbers of HIV and

sexually transmitted infections had continued to rise since its last report in 2001 and that genitourinary medicine clinics will find it very hard to meet the 2008 target of a 48 hour access time, as waiting times had worsened. Poor facilities were another barrier to service expansion, it said.

"We welcome the extra investment of £130m (\$250m; €190m) over three years, but estimates provided suggest that around £150m of capital funding would be needed to modernise GUM [genitourinary medicine] and up to £30m per year revenue funding," the report said. By not mobilising GPs to prioritise sexual health through the general medical services contract, the government had wasted an opportunity to ease pressure on hospital services, it said. □

New Developments in Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Policy is available at www.parliament.uk

Doctors who performed late abortion will not be prosecuted

Clare Dyer *legal correspondent, BMJ*

The UK's Crown Prosecution Service has decided not to prosecute two doctors involved in a late abortion of a fetus with a cleft lip and palate, after a lengthy investigation triggered by a complaint from a Church of England trainee cleric.

Police initially investigated after a complaint by Joanna Jepson, 28, who was born with a congenital jaw defect (corrected by surgery when she was in her teens), but decided not to prosecute. The investigation was reopened after Ms Jepson sought a judicial review of that decision in the High Court.

Under the 1967 Abortion Act, abortions cannot be carried out on women who are more than 24 weeks pregnant, except where there is a substantial risk that the child will be born with a serious handicap. Ms Jepson, who has a brother with Down's syndrome, insisted that cleft lip and palate could not be considered a serious handicap.

The chief crown prosecutor for West Mercia, Jim England, said the doctors who authorised

Joanna Jepson might revive judicial review proceedings

the termination had decided in good faith that a substantial risk existed that the child would be seriously handicapped if born. He said that therefore no prosecution would be brought.

Mr England said the evidence considered by the Crown Prosecution Service included medical records, guidance from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, evidence from professionals

involved in the care of the woman concerned, interviews with the two doctors, and opinions from independent medical experts.

Ms Jepson, now a curate at St Michael's Church, Chester, discovered in September 2002 from published statistics that one abortion for cleft lip and cleft palate had been performed after 24 weeks in 2001.

Her solicitors wrote to the Metropolitan Police asking for an investigation. In June 2003 she was told that West Mercia Constabulary had investigated and would not be charging the doctors.

In August she launched an application for judicial review of the decision, and in April 2004 the police agreed to reopen the investigation. Last September the police submitted their report and file of evidence to the Crown Prosecution Service, which after the fuller inquiry decided the original decision was correct.

Ms Jepson said it was possible that she would revive the judicial review proceedings, which were stayed when the police agreed to carry out a fuller investigation. "I am going to meet with my barristers in the next two weeks and consider what remains unresolved." □