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UK group puts £74m into research infrastructure

The UK Clinical Research Collaboration announced last week the launch of a £74m (\$138m; €108m) package to boost experimental research in the United Kingdom. It announced that the money would go towards building a nationwide infrastructure dedicated exclusively to patient based medical research. The partnership comprises the Department of Health and the Scottish Health Executive as well as the Wellcome Trust, the Wolfson Foundation, and the Medical Research Council.

Mark Walport, director of the Wellcome Trust, said that whereas in the past research staff had been expected to share equipment and premises primarily used for treatment, £30m will be spent on purpose built environments for use by university and hospital trust research teams. "Research has traditionally been embedded in the health service, but increasingly there's a realisation that it might be better done elsewhere," he said. The collaboration, which was established in April 2004, is also working on building up a central database to map activity and allow comparison between projects.

Madeleine Brettingham *London*

MEPs vote to end right of individuals to opt out of 48 hour week

The European parliament has voted overwhelmingly to end the possibility of individuals opting out of the maximum 48 hour week and has decided that the whole time that employees spend on call should be counted as working hours.

The two key amendments to the European Union's existing working time directive fundamentally alter the proposal the EU commission had tabled last year.

While critical of the opt out

WHO should take the lead in combating obesity

Obesity in school age children is a global problem, and television watching is a main contributor (*Obesity Reviews* 2005;6:123-32). Research based on almost 140 000 adolescents aged 10 to 16 in 34 countries showed that, in 77% of the countries, at least 10% were overweight, having a body mass index (BMI) of more than 25. In a fifth of the countries at least 3% of children were obese, with a BMI of 30 or more.

The authors say that the World Health Organization should now take a lead in combating the problem. "The prevention and treatment of overweight in school aged youth requires increased efforts and partnerships at all levels, including regional and national governments and international agencies," they say.

"All of these groups should be responsible for promoting physical activity, healthy diets, and healthy body weights. Because obesity in young persons is a global phenomenon, it would be natural and timely for the WHO to take a leadership role," they add.

The two countries with the highest prevalence of overweight and obese youth were Malta (25.4% and 7.9%) and the United States (25.1% and 6.8%). Prevalence of overweight and obese youth was particularly high in countries in North America, Great Britain, and southwestern Europe.

Roger Dobson *Abergavenny*

because it believed it was being abused, the commission had stopped short of calling for its abolition. It had also proposed creating two types of on-call time—active and inactive—with the latter not counting towards the working week.

The MEPs want to abolish that distinction between the two

categories and to see the possibility to opt out scrapped within three years of the legislation coming into force.

The amendments have had a mixed response from doctors. Both were welcomed by the Standing Committee of European Doctors but Simon Eccles, the chairman of the BMA's

junior doctors committee, had a more qualified reaction. "Although the working time directive has been instrumental in bringing doctors' hours to safe levels, the BMA believes that those who have control of their working patterns should have the right to opt out," he said.

Rory Watson *Brussels*

Doctor who exaggerated child abuse is cleared of misconduct

A consultant paediatrician who admitted exaggerating a report on alleged child abuse was cleared of serious professional misconduct by the General Medical Council this week. Camille San Lazaro behaved in an "inappropriate, irresponsible, and unprofessional" way, but her actions did not cross the threshold of serious misconduct, a GMC panel pronounced.

Dr Lazaro, a consultant at the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle upon Tyne, was reported to the GMC after she admitted producing an "overstated, exaggerated, and emotive" report to back up compensation claims by children who had attended the city's Shieldfield Nursery to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority.

Her admission was made while giving evidence at the trial about a libel action brought by two former nursery nurses who were blamed for the abuse by an independent inquiry set up by Newcastle City Council.

The two, Christopher Lillie and Dawn Reed, won £200 000 (\$368 000; € 291 000) libel damages each from the inquiry team for being wrongly branded paedophiles, after the judge, Mr Justice Eady, ruled that the abuse had never happened. The judge described Dr Lazaro's report as a "shambles."

Clearing Dr Lazaro of serious professional misconduct, the panel's chairman, Ian Neale, acknowledged that at the time she had been professionally isolated and was struggling to cope with an excessive caseload.

Clare Dyer *legal correspondent, BMJ*