trusts themselves. The researchers found unsettling evidence of "governors not governing... and organisations which can hardly be said to be 'owned' by local people."

It says: "Political rhetoric needs to be tested against reality... in what respect, and how, are boards accountable to local people?"

The authors of the report argue that governing boards are unrepresentative and excluded from the management process. High level decisions are taken by trust chairs and chief executives, who are unelected and unaccountable to the local population.

In most instances the boards of governors—the elected bodies established to oversee the running of trusts—are voted in by only a few thousand people or less. In one case a governor was elected by only 95 votes.

Madeleine Brettingham *London*

Governance of Foundation Trusts is available from the Nuffield Trust, 59 New Cavendish Street, London W1G 7LP, price £5.

Netherlands approves introduction of competition into health service

The Dutch Senate this week approved major changes to the Dutch health service, despite widespread concerns among the medical profession. The changes will introduce competition and market forces into the system. Ninety per cent of GPs staged a three day strike last month in connection with the changes (*BMJ* 2005;330:1287, 4 Jun).

The health minister, Hans Hoogervorst, won Senate approval with a series of promises, including a pledge to consider his own position if the changes, due to start on 1 January, result in chaos.

The vote ends decades of attempted change. It scraps the current division between public health insurance for most people and private insurance for the better off. Instead, a basic

insurance package will be available for all, with a single, though for many much higher, annual premium of about £750 (€1120; \$1360).

Health insurance companies will have to compete for patients. But many doctors fear that this gives insurers too much power.

The Dutch Medical Association has written to senators listing its concerns. Top is insufficient guarantees for patient confidentiality. Doctors had "grave concerns" about being "increasingly confronted" with requests from insurers for more information.

Tony Sheldon *Utrecht*

HIV infections in the US pass one million

The number of US citizens living with HIV has surpassed one million for the first time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has estimated.

Dr Kate Glynn, of the CDC said that their estimates, as of December 2003, were that between 1 039 000 and 1 185 000 Americans were infected with the virus.

The ethnic breakdown is 47% black, 34% white, 17% Hispanic, with the balance composed of Asian and Native American populations. Black and Hispanic people comprise roughly 13% and 14% of the total US population and are disproportionately affected by HIV.

Men having sex with men constitutes the largest single risk factor for becoming infected (45%); high risk heterosexual behaviour was next on the list (27%); followed by injecting drug use (22%); and the dual risks of injection drug use and men having sex with men (5%).

Between 24% and 27% of those infections remain undiagnosed, said Ronald Valdiserri, deputy director of the National Center for HIV, STD, and TB Prevention at CDC. That is particularly true for young black men who have sex with men, and ignorance continues to play a substantial role in the transmission of new infections.

Bob Roehr *Atlanta*

Appeal launched to step up research and development for neglected diseases

Rhona MacDonald *Oxford*

A number of Nobel laureates, researchers, doctors, and non-governmental organisations joined the independent foundation Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative last week. This appeals for the development of drugs, diagnostic tests, and vaccines for diseases which mainly affect people in developing countries, and which have therefore been neglected by the pharmaceutical industry.

The appeal was launched simultaneously in London, New Delhi, Nairobi, and Rio de Janeiro and was supported by Médecins Sans Frontières and Oxfam. The launch was exactly one month before the meeting of the G8 (the world's most industrialised countries) in Gleneagles, Scotland, where the leaders of the world's richest nations will be discussing global health, Africa, and development.

The appeal asks governments to make neglected diseases a research priority, to provide sustained financial support for such research, and to reduce patent and regulatory barriers for products for such diseases. Bernard Pecoul, executive director of the initiative, said, "There needs to be a fundamental overhaul of the current system to properly address the fatal imbalance in the current [research and development] system."

Every day, more than 35 000 people worldwide die from infectious diseases, such as

AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and more neglected diseases, such as leishmaniasis, Chagas' disease, and sleeping sickness. Despite this, there are no safe, affordable, effective, and field adapted vaccines, diagnostic tests, and drugs to tackle them.

Tido von Schoen-Angerer, coordinator of research and development for Médecins Sans Frontières' campaign for access to essential medicines, said, "We cannot accept that we must practise second class medicine just because our patients live in poor countries. We need a culture of medical innovation that meets the needs of neglected patients." He added, "Only strong international leadership will make this happen."

John Sulston, who shared the Nobel prize for physiology in 2002 for sequencing the human genome, signed up to the appeal and told the audience in London that the human genome project could not have happened without clear political leadership and investment in the "public good."

He saw this latest development as a natural progression from the success of the human genome project, which was "an example of the general access to knowledge that is absolutely fundamental to progress in science and medicine." □

See www.dndi.org, and to sign the appeal go to www.researchappeal.org.

The Drugs for Neglected Diseases initiative used a postcard (above) to get its message across