

Channel 5 abortion poll

Following a televised debate on Kirsty Young's *Tell the Truth* about whether UK abortion laws should be toughened, 49% of viewers who phoned the poll said 'Yes' and 51% said 'No'. The pro-choice case centred on the absolute autonomous right of the woman over her unborn baby in all circumstances, and the more they spoke the more they condemned themselves. Had the programme lasted longer, perhaps they'd have lost their tiny majority? (Source: *Channel 5 News Update*, 9pm Sunday 20th September 1998)

Dying for doctrine

172 children died when they might have lived because they or their parents had 'doctrinal' objections to medical treatment. The most common causes of death were pneumonia, meningitis, diabetes and measles. The report authors call for the repeal of all religious exemption laws protecting parents from prosecution for neglect or abuse. (Source: *Paediatrics*, 1998; 101: 625-9, quoted by Minerva, *British Medical Journal*, 19 September 1998; 317: 826)

Doctors, drink and drugs

90 JHOs (51 of them women) who had graduated from Newcastle responded to a survey about drinking habits, illicit drug use, and stress levels. 93% drank alcohol, and of these more than 60% of both sexes exceeded recommended limits. One man drank 42 pints a week, and one woman 30 pints a week. 35% of men and 19% of women were currently using cannabis, 11% regularly. A further 13% of the men and 10% of the women were using magic mushrooms, LSD, ecstasy, cocaine, amyl nitrate or amphetamine. The main reason given for all this consumption was 'pleasure', but what are they doing to themselves? What are they doing to their patients? (Source: *The Lancet*, 1998; 352: 785-6)

Nursing recruitment crisis

The number of nurses entering the profession in the UK has fallen to the lowest level since records began, and one in four new nurses in Britain is recruited from overseas, according to the UKCC of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting. Do Christians still respond to a 'call' to

nursing? (Source: *British Medical Journal*, 22 August 1998; 317: 490)

Will 'nurse consultants' help?

Doubtless in response to this crisis, the UK government proposed creating a new nursing grade of 'nurse consultants' to enhance the pay and career prospects of nurses. They would specialise, have their own clinics, and take over some of the current responsibilities of junior doctors. Predictably, doctors' leaders were opposed to the suggestion. Is this just professional chauvinism or are there legitimate concerns about 'too many chiefs and not enough Indians'? (Sources: *British Medical Journal*, 12 September 1998; 317: 698 and various media comments)

Stolen kidneys for sale in India

The Indian state of Uttar Pradesh has declared trade in human organs illegal after the arrest of three surgeons on charges of robbing poor patients of kidneys and selling them to rich patient/clients. Including the operation, the going rate for a stolen kidney was reported to be £4-6,000. (Source: *The Independent*, 23 June 1998)

Affordable spectacles for developing countries

In a *BMJ* leading article 'dedicated to the memory of the late Dr Joseph Taylor, who championed the concept of optical workshops and affordable spectacles throughout Africa', ophthalmologist Andrew Potter ends a succinct set of recommendations for how to get glasses to those who need them with the words - 'Many of the problems of the developing world are genuinely difficult to solve: this one is not'. (Source: *British Medical Journal*, 29 August 1998; 317: 551-2)

Woman pregnant by dead man's sperm

In a world 'first' a Los Angeles surgeon has made a woman pregnant using sperm taken from her dead husband. In July 1995 sperm were extracted from Bruce Vernoff, 35, who had died 24 hours earlier from a reaction to medication, and were used to fertilise an egg removed from his widow, Gaby. She had the egg implanted this summer, three years later. Arguments have raged over the rights of

families to use the genetic material of the deceased. An HFEA spokesperson confirmed the procedure would be illegal in Britain in the absence of 'effective consent'. Is this the sort of 'coming back from the dead' we want? (Source: Charles Arthur, *The Independent*, 16 July 1998)

VES activists turn murder hearing into carnival

When Dr David Moor appeared at Newcastle Magistrates' Court on 9th September on a charge of murdering his patient George Liddell, aged 85, the 'Friends of Dr Moor' who are backed by the Voluntary Euthanasia Society organised a six piece Dixieland jazz band to play outside the court. This was for their 150 supporters and so Dr Moor might be 'uplifted'. What about respect for the deceased's family? What about the dignity of British justice? The trial begins at Newcastle Crown Court on 19th October. (Source: Ann Treneman, *The Independent*, 11 September 1998)

Palliative care - to remain a euthanasia-free zone?

Eutyclus would answer this provocative title question in a *JME* guest editorial in the affirmative but Bobbie Farsides, Lecturer in Medical Ethics at King's College London, argues 'the palliative care movement can afford to be a broader church' and that there may be a legitimate place for euthanasia as a final option. She complains 'What one seems to encounter in palliative care is a uniformity and explicitness of shared moral beliefs around major ethical issues, which is not reflected in other specialties'. Perhaps the other specialties have got it wrong? (Source: *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 1998; 24: 149-150)

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