

Time for a 'Universal Sabbath'?

At a conference on cloning organised by CORE (Comment on Reproductive Ethics), former Chief Rabbi Lord Jakobovits argued for the 'Universal Sabbath' where scientific advances are scrutinised as the world was after the six days of its creation. Just as God rested, it is now time for the world to rest and consider the moral constraints necessary for scientific advances such as cloning, he said. (Source: *Bulletin of Medical Ethics*, May 1999; p13-16)

Human cloning banned in research

Perhaps somebody in a high place was listening? Three months later there was surprise when the UK government announced a moratorium on using cloning technology for research as well as for reproductive purposes. Public concern about GM foods was probably behind the political caution, and the possible medical benefits of therapeutic cloning will be reassessed. (Source: *The Independent*, 25 June 1999)

IVF pioneer 'preaches' on sin

At the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology, Robert Edwards, who led the team behind Britain's first test tube baby, evangelised for social engineering: 'Soon it will be a sin for parents to have a child that carries the heavy burden of genetic disease. We are entering a world where we have to consider the quality of our children.' (Source: *Metro*, 5 July 1999)

A complex about the medical-industrial complex?

The *BME* Editor is even more hard-hitting than usual about a powerful new complex promoted by the US government and European-based pharmaceutical multinationals: 'The reason it is unlikely that the medical-industrial complex adds to human welfare is that this is not its purpose. Its purpose is to make money, by whatever means, including subverting the medical profession and misleading the public.' (Source: *Bulletin of Medical Ethics*, May 1999; p1)

Who's your father?

At least six children were born in the UK in 1998 who had been conceived several years after their fathers died. Will children born to 'fathers from beyond the

grave' face psychological difficulties in later life? the survey asks. Some weeks later a headline claims 'A donor is not a "real" dad' as a columnist recalls a student colleague who went off sniggering 'to collect his £15 "money for nothing" fee to fuel his Friday nights in the pub'. (Sources: *The Independent*, 12 July 1999 and 29 July 1999)

Internet sites encourage suicide . . .

Internet sites advising how to commit suicide may discourage people from seeking psychiatric help. There are now more than 100,000 sites about suicide, and 14s-24s, a group likely to use the Net, are also a group likely to consider suicide. One site offering touch key access to an A-Z of suicide techniques blasphemously calls itself 'The Church of Euthanasia' - www.enviroweb.org/coe/ (Source: *British Medical Journal*, 7 August 1999; 319: 337)

. . . and spirochaetes

An outbreak of syphilis in San Francisco was traced to an Internet chat room. Six men with syphilis had used it to find sexual partners. The anonymity of cyberspace makes contact tracing a challenge. (Source: *Minerva* in the *British Medical Journal*, 4 September 1999; 319: 650 quoting *New York Times*, 25 August 1999)

Churches slam 'immoral' curriculum - with effect

The Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church jointly criticised the new national curriculum (compulsory for all children aged 5-16 from September 2000) for neglecting to teach young people spiritual and moral values. Divorce and separation were mentioned but 'we are dismayed that the framework does not contain a single reference to marriage or to the primary responsibility of parents for the education of their children'. In September the government announced substantial improvements. (Sources: *The Independent*, 2 July 1999 and *BBC Radio 4 News*, 9 September 1999)

'No' to medicinal cannabis

After a passionate debate at the ARM of the British Medical Association, doctors voted against legalising cannabis for medicinal use by 125 to 116. They accepted more research was needed on cannabinoids, and also rejected the

decriminalisation of cannabis for recreational use. (Source: *BMA News Review*, July 1999; p9)

£1 in every £12 goes on negligence

Eutychus has a love-hate relationship with the output of Ms Polly Toynbee. 50% of the time she talks sense; 50% of the time she doesn't. In the former category was her comment in an analysis of the '£1 in every £12 of the NHS budget wasted on negligence cases' where she wrote: 'The compensation culture is morally corrosive, encouraging greed while implying that life has no risks and someone else is always to blame'. (Source: *BMA News Review*, July 1999; p28)

Freudian slip

Between 1923 and 1939 Sigmund Freud endured 30 surgical procedures for oral cancer. Early, he agreed with his personal physician he would want help with dying, and when he felt his suffering was intolerable he reminded his doctor of this agreement. He went into a terminal coma after two large doses of morphine. (Source: *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 1999; 159: 1521-1525)

Seeking Pharaoh's daughter?

There is historical precedent for trusting babies to baskets among bulrushes, but Hungarian hospitals have responded to the increasing problem of abandoned babies by installing an incubator in reception areas, where babies can be left anonymously. 'Nine babies - that's how many this has saved' said the Schopf-Merei Agost Hospital in Budapest. (Sources: *Exodus 2: 1-10* and *British Medical Journal*, 24 July 1999; 319: 214)

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