



# EUTYCHUS

## Misplaced faith

President George Bush's decision to set up a federal bureau for faith based social services has refuelled fears about children's lives being put at risk. A 1998 study in *Paediatrics* (101:625-9) has already documented the deaths of 172 children whose parents belonged to faith healing sects that forbid traditional medical care for illnesses. The US Supreme Court has twice - both in 1944 and 1990 - affirmed a child's constitutional right to medical treatment; with the earlier judgement declaring that parents are not free 'to make martyrs of their children'. But congress subsequently ruled in its 1996 Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act that there was no federal requirement for a child to receive 'any medical service or treatment against the religious beliefs of the parent or legal guardian'. (*BMJ* 2001; 322:512, 3 March)

## Misplaced embryos?

A Rotherham woman who conceived triplets, after having given permission for only two embryos to be implanted during IVF, has successfully sued a Sheffield infertility clinic. Patricia Thompson, agreed to accept £20,000 in damages. (*BMJ* 2001; 322:508, 3 March)

## Superior genes

Down's syndrome children possess three copies of the gene USP25, which is often lacking from the cancer cells of people who develop lung cancer. Down's syndrome children are resistant to many forms of cancer, and the gene may hold the key for gene therapy for those who are less genetically resilient in the face of neoplastic disease. (*The Times* 2001;11, 23 January).

## Pharmacists in revolt

A survey of doctors and pharmacists in London has indicated significant opposition to the reclassification of the abortifacient morning-after pill as a drug available from pharmacists without prescription. The research, published in the *Journal of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society*, indicated that 45% of family doctors and nearly a quarter of pharmacists were against the reclassification. 57% of pharmacists and more than a third of doctors believed that the reclassification would lead to reduced use of routine birth control methods. (*Daily Mail*, 5 March - Reported in *SPUC Digest*)

## Furious with Philistines

Samson may be the first case of antisocial personality disorder according to three Californian psychologists. A positive diagnosis of the condition requires only three of seven recognised behaviours catalogued in the American Psychiatric Association's 900-page *DSM-IV*. Samson has six, including impulsiveness, recklessness and fighting. The leader of the San Diego Research Team told *New Scientist*: 'It's almost as if the writer of the story has the DSM criteria tacked to the wall and he is writing a sketch. But this was 3,000 years before the DSM.' (*The Times* 2001;10, 15 February)

## Serial polygamy

A 'large minority' of young people choose to live with a variety of partners rather than marry, according to a report by the Institute for Social and Economic Research. Based on the 1998 British Household Survey of over 10,000 adults across Britain, the report, *Personal Relationships and Marriage Expectations*, shows that the rate of marriage has sharply declined. In 1988 57.5 and 95.6 per 1,000 of single men and women respectively got married. The equivalent figures for 1998 were 20.2 and 39.6. Only 36% of children born to parents living together will live with both parents until they are 16. (*The Times* 2001; 8, 14 February)

## Leading by example?

Rich countries have a moral obligation to tackle poverty according to Clare Short, Secretary for International Development. Her new white paper on globalisation and poverty pledges to raise UK aid budget to 0.33% of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2003-4; the UN target is 0.7%. The World Bank has shown that the most important intervention to promote development is to ensure that children, especially girls, complete primary education. *Eliminating World Poverty: Making Globalisation work for the Poor* is accessible at the Department of International Development's website at [www.dfid.gov.uk](http://www.dfid.gov.uk). (*BMJ* 2000; 321:1492, 16 December)

## Wade in the balance?

Henry Wade, the former attorney in Dallas county, Texas, who was named as the defendant in the Roe v Wade case, has died at the age of 86. Lawyers filed a lawsuit in Dallas county on behalf of 'Jane Roe' in 1969, claiming that state restrictions on abortion were unconstitutional. Henry Wade eventually lost the case in the US Supreme Court in 1973 when the justices declared a constitutional right to abortion. Norma McCorvey, the actual 'Jane Roe' in the case, went through with her pregnancy and gave birth to the unborn child at the centre of the case. She is now a pro-life campaigner. (*Dallas Morning Metro*, 5 March - Reported in *SPUC Digest*)

## Royal approval

£1.6 billion is spent on complementary and alternative therapies in Britain each year according to a House of Lords Report. About 15 million people use herbal medicines and one in three have tried other therapies such as aromatherapy and acupuncture. There are now 40,000 alternative therapists, and 36,000 family doctors. Currently, only osteopathy and chiropractic are regulated by law. The British Medical Association backs tougher regulation. In a secret 90-minute meeting with Health Secretary Alan Milburn, Prince Charles, a well-known long-time advocate of alternative medicine, pushed for at least £10 million to be allocated for research into the treatments. For every £100 spent on orthodox medicine research only 8p is spent on complementary therapies. (*The Times* 2000; 1,4, 29 November)