

Pharmacists' right to say no

University of Hertfordshire academics want removal of the right of pharmacists to refuse to distribute the morning-after pill. They argue it is 'the power of veto over the liberty of others, and over the implementation of public policy'. Pharmacists can refuse to sell the pill but must direct the customer to another provider. The counter argument is that professionals must have a right to act according to their conscience and this change would risk pharmacists being reduced in status to vending dispensers. (Gallagher C *et al*, *J Med Ethics* doi:10.1136/medethics-2012-100975, 30 January 2013. <http://bit.ly/12eVKiL>)

Best for baby?

The baby food industry seems to be constantly under scrutiny. While launching new campaigns to persuade the government to require baby milk formula packaging to warn that 'breast is best', Save the Children UK, has been giving attention to East Asia and the Pacific. It says the region is perceived as a lucrative new market for the industry. Thanks to aggressive marketing strategies the proportion of women there who breastfeed fell from 45% to 29% in just three years. (ref: <http://bit.ly/Y2NQpu> and <http://bit.ly/VvgvWO>)

Gun violence: The mental health factor

14 December's shootings in Newtown, Connecticut, where 20 children and six teachers died, has reverberated globally. One issue emerging in the US is the mental health factor in gun violence. The White House is facilitating a national dialogue. *The Lancet* comments that high-quality research and safeguarding of lines of communication between patients, doctors and law authorities is essential to ensure success of the dialogue. (*The Lancet*, 26 January 2013, Volume 381, Issue 9863, <http://bit.ly/Y3NCNd>)

Horse sense

Jokes abound over horsemeat sold as beef. For many consumers, however, this is no laughing matter. Is this a deception akin to dodgy weighing scales - something 'God detests' according to Proverbs 20:10? A Consumer Intelligence survey reveals that one in four adults (24%) say they would buy less processed meat in the wake of the scandal, while 22% said that they would no longer buy any processed meat. Although 24.6% said they were now buying more unprocessed meat, 19% said they would like to, but could not afford to. (*BBC News* 18 February 2013. <http://bbc.in/15nWMJn>)

Self-help with depression

Self-help books provide effective treatment in the face of a growing incidence of depression, says a new study. Patients offered books and sessions advising how to use them had lower levels of depression one year on than those offered the usual care by their GPs. 'More than 200 patients who had been diagnosed with depression by their GP took part in the study, half of whom were also on antidepressant drugs,' said the BBC. (Plos One, Williams C *et al*. Guided Self-Help Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Depression in Primary Care: A Randomised Controlled Trial. 11 January 2013. <http://bit.ly/U8blfx>)

Ethics by numbers

Can we clone a Neanderthal? Is this desirable? Yes on both counts says George Church, Harvard Professor and a founder of the Human Genome Project. He told German magazine *Der Spiegel*, 'I tend to decide on what is desirable based on societal consensus. My role is to determine what's technologically feasible.' In other words let's do ethics by numbers. But why shout about this idea from the rooftops? This kind of cloning is illegal in most countries and the ethical and safety concerns are legion. But high-profile media pronouncements can serve to soften up public opinion to the unthinkable. It won't hurt the search for grant funds either. (*Der Spiegel* 2013/3. 14 January 2013. <http://bit.ly/11NjWIK>)

HIV infection rates static despite advances in testing

Despite massive improvements in treating and testing for HIV there has been no dent in numbers of infections in gay and bisexual men in England and Wales, says a new study. There were signs, too, of a return to risky sexual practice. New infections stayed at the same level - about 2,300 a year - between 2001 and 2010, despite better early diagnosis and greater take-up of medication. There is an 'all time high' in the spread of HIV among men who have sex with men, said the Health Protection Agency. (*The Lancet Infectious Diseases*, Early Online Publication, 1 February 2013. <http://bit.ly/14uSgr9> HPA. *HIV and sexually transmitted infections*. <http://bit.ly/Sr7wkF>)

Restore compassion, please

The new Chief Nursing Officer for England, Jane Cummings, has added her voice to those expressing concern over falling care standards in the NHS. She wants to see nursing recover its core values: particularly care, compassion, courage, commitment and communication. The issues are deep-rooted including nurse-patient ratios and how new recruits are taught about compassion alongside other core competencies. In a system driven by performance targets, there is little clarity about how care is measured. Is wide-ranging culture change possible? How can sharing the story and role model of Jesus contribute to the discourse? (*BBC Today Programme*, 4 December 2012. <http://bbc.in/12f5724>)

Now it's quadruple helix

CMF thought itself innovative when coining the name *Triple Helix* for this magazine, a God-ward echo on ground-breaking work by Francis Crick and James Watson on the double-helix structure of DNA. Now Cambridge scientists are heralding discovery of four-stranded 'quadruple-helix' DNA in human cells, which they claim may lead to new cancer drugs. Julie Sharp, of Cancer Research UK, project funders, says: 'It's been 60 years since its structure was solved but work like this shows us that the story of DNA continues to twist and turn.' (*Varsity Online*, 28 January 2013. <http://bit.ly/Uyc3CK>)