

Fiendishly clever creams

Specialists in London tested 11 Chinese herbal creams used to treat skin conditions and found eight illegally contained dexamethasone. In addition to the potential health risks of this 'alternative medicine' the authors discuss 'the ethical issue arising from giving steroids to patients who, disillusioned with conventional treatment, believe they are taking herbal medications that do not contain steroids'. (Source: *British Medical Journal*, 27 February 1999; 318: 563-564)

Brits opposed to human cloning . . .

Even among groups who may benefit from the technique, there is virtually no public support in the UK for reproductive cloning. All but four of the 79 lay people recruited to a Wellcome Trust study 'rejected the idea of human cloning outright'. Many were concerned about the therapeutic use of embryos and did not trust scientists to regulate themselves. (Source: *Public Perspectives on Human Cloning*, available free from 0171-611 7221 and at www.wellcome.ac.uk/publications)

. . . though organised crime thinks there's money in it

The head of a new research unit at the National Criminal Intelligence Service has warned that illegal trade in human body parts and genetically engineered children is a future market for organised crime. 'By 2020, 95% of human body parts could be replaceable by laboratory-grown organs' predicts Robert Hall, expecting this to stimulate criminal entrepreneurs. Crime groups are involved already in the international sale of transplant organs. (Source: *The Independent*, 3 March 1999)

The Dead Citizens Charter

Eutychus wondered initially whether this headline was a spoof, then whether this charter was right to take patient's rights beyond the grave, but studying this statement from the National Funerals College concluded it was an excellent contribution to the College's aim of 'improving the uniformly dismal standard of funerals'. (Source: *Bulletin of Medical Ethics*, January 1999, p10-11)

Recycle the dead to help the living

argues Professor John Harris. In a

response to the shortage of donor organs (and his case deserves study) this secular bioethicist says all organs from dead bodies should be automatically available at death without any consent being required. Wonder what the British public and the National Funerals College think? (Source: *The Independent*, 19 February 1999)

Men could bear children

Another high-profile 'ethics expert', Professor Lord Winston of IVF fame, says in a forthcoming book that an embryo could be implanted in a man's abdomen, with the placenta attached to an internal organ such as the bowel, and the baby later delivered by Caesarean section. The technique could be another way of allowing homosexual couples to have children. Eutychus doesn't fancy this gender bender distender. (Source: *The Independent*, 22 February 1999)

Suicide kills more young men than RTAs

in some parts of Britain and is one of the country's biggest public health problems. Badly educated young men hit by unemployment are at greatest risk, with those in social class V four times more likely to kill themselves than those in social class I. Meanwhile, the fastest growing contact method for the Samaritans is e-mail: 'The messages that come via e-mail are much starker. Directness is part of the method.' (Source: *The Independent*, 24 February 1999)

Abortion rise blamed on Pill scare

There were 179,700 abortions in England and Wales in 1997, compared with 177,500 in 1996 and 163,600 in 1995. Just under 21% of all pregnancies are now ended by abortion. *Health Statistics Quarterly* editor Karen Dunnell said 'there is a general feeling that the Pill scare caused a crisis of confidence among women in methods of contraception . . . it may be one of the reasons that larger numbers of women are deciding to use abortion rather than the Pill'. (Source: *The Times*, 17 February 1999)

Abortion: legalised in Northern Ireland?

The all-party Parliamentary group on population, development and reproductive health called in December for abortion in Northern Ireland to be placed on the same legal basis as elsewhere in

the UK. A backbench motion which might have government support is anticipated, yet more than almost any other issue, opposition to liberal abortion unites politicians in Northern Ireland. (Source: *The Independent*, 10 December 1998)

'Jerusalem syndrome' and the millennium

Mental health services in Israel are preparing for a major outbreak of the 'Jerusalem syndrome' with the expected increase in visitors to the Holy Land from the turn of the millennium. The temporary psychiatric condition has been known to Israeli psychiatrists for decades - patients believe they have become biblical figures such as Moses, John the Baptist or Jesus. (Source: *British Medical Journal*, 20 February 1999; 318: 484)

Tissue engineered bladders

Returning to the organ theme, animal experiments have shown that bladders grown in the laboratory with tissue engineering techniques can be successfully implanted. Researchers at Boston and Harvard used dogs and urodynamic studies showed that those receiving implants regained 95% of original bladder capacity, were continent, and voided normally. Human trials could begin within two years and the technique might help babies with congenital bladder conditions and adults who've lost bladders through cancer or trauma. (Source: *Nature Biotechnology*, 1999; 17: 140-155)

Doctor/clergy co-operation - better in US than UK

Eutychus found most of the above pretty depressing this quarter, but was cheered by reports of clergy and doctors working together more effectively. American family doctors though are more likely than British GPs to refer patients to a clergyman for advice, counselling or spiritual healing. (Source: *Archives of Family Medicine*, 1998; 7: 548-553)

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