

EUTYCHUS

Where have the women gone?

A study released by UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, has claimed that selective abortions, as well as infanticide and inferior access to food and medicines, have led to there being 60 million fewer women globally than demographic trends suggest there should be. The report said: 'They are victims of their own families, killed deliberately or through neglect, simply because they are female'. (*The Independent*, 1 June 2000 and *ABC News online*, 31 May 2000)



Cloning backtrack

A member of the team that created Dolly, the first cloned sheep, has admitted that expectations for the technology have been unfulfilled. Professor Keith Campbell of Nottingham University, UK, said: 'Cloning is turning out to be very expensive and very inefficient'. A report in the June issue of *Science* claims that even after cloned

embryos are implanted in a surrogate mother's womb, only two in 100 are successfully born. (*Daily Express*, 19 June 2000)

Discriminatory directive

A new EU directive has been proposed which could make it much more difficult for churches, religious organisations and church schools to retain a distinctive religious ethos. The directive makes it illegal for a Church to advertise for Christian staff to fill posts such as verger or vicar's secretary. Christian medical practices may no longer be able to prefer Christian doctors and hospices might be barred from preferring pro-life staff opposed to euthanasia. The government intends to sign the directive, which would apply to all faiths, in September. (*The Christian Institute*, June 2000)

Jehovah's Witnesses' rule change

The Jehovah's Witnesses' twelve-member world governing body has ruled that members of the six-million-strong cult will no longer be excommunicated if they accept blood transfusions. Instead, they will be 'given support' and welcomed back if they make the decision during 'a moment of weakness' and later regret it. (*Evening Standard*, 14 June 2000) The JW stand is based on a misinterpretation of Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 17:10-14 and Acts 15:20,29.

Ethical paternalism?

The BMA Ethics Committee chairman Michael Wilks has come under attack from the chairman of the association's students' committee for complaining about an article included in the students' annual conference pack. The piece, written by CMF student representative, Laurence Crutchlow, criticises the BMA's policy on the withdrawal of artificial hydration and nutrition. Students' leader Nick Jenkins used his annual conference address to berate Wilks, calling his letter 'patronising and confrontational' and accusing him of '(violating) the autonomy and indeed the very purpose of having a student body' by insisting that his comments be circulated to student delegates. (*Doctor* 2000; 6 April:25)

The sins of the mothers?

The British government has announced a campaign to persuade pregnant women to stop smoking in a bid to cut miscarriages and stillbirths. It is claimed that 400 children die in the UK every year before or shortly after childbirth as a result of their mother's cigarette habit. The initiative will cost 1 million British pounds and include a 'kick the habit' telephone hotline. (*Daily Mail*, 20 June 2000)

Paying to serve

Students reading medicine could have to pay up to £36,000 to become a doctor under 'reforms' proposed by economists working for the Russell Group of 19 leading universities. The report claims that the American-style funding system will involve tuition fees of up to £6,000 per year. (*The Times*, 31 May 2000)

Doctors are not prophets

A study published in the *British Medical Journal* has found that physicians tend to overestimate probable length of survival by a factor of five. Overly optimistic predictions were most likely to be given to cancer sufferers. The researchers conclude that 'undue optimism about survival prospects may contribute to late referral for hospice care, with negative implications for patients'. (*Reuters Health* 2000; 18 February)

The politics of the parapet

Cardinal Thomas Winning, Archbishop of Glasgow, has defended the right of the Catholic Church to speak out on life issues. He said, 'It is because the Church loves that she speaks out. And so when we criticise the loophole in the law which we believe could allow backdoor euthanasia, when we say that handing out abortifacients is wrong, we do so because we care. To follow the politics of the parapet, ducking every time an issue is raised, is unworthy of Christians. For them it is simply not an option.' (*Daily Telegraph*, 9 June 2000)

New European Charter

A draft of a new European Charter of Fundamental Rights outlaws human cloning, as well as eugenic practices and financial gain from the human body. The document, obtained by *The Times*, lists 50 rights in a wide variety of areas. The British government is reported to be hostile to the charter which, if incorporated into European law, would override the national laws of European Union member states. (*The Times*, 1 June 2000)

Turning back the years

In a major Canadian centre, life expectancy at age 20 years for gay and bisexual men was 8 to 20 years less than for all men. If the same pattern of mortality were to continue, the authors estimated that nearly half of gay and bisexual men currently aged 20 years would not reach their 65th birthday. Under even the most liberal assumptions, gay and bisexual men in this urban centre were now experiencing a life expectancy similar to that experienced by all men in Canada in the year 1871. (Hogg RS et al. Modelling the impact of HIV disease on mortality in gay and bisexual men. *Int J Epidemiol* 1997; 26(3):657-61)