



EUTYCHUS

Ends and Means

A trial using transplanted brain cells from aborted fetuses to improve the symptoms of Parkinson's disease, has seriously backfired. Researchers at Colorado University found that whilst some clinical improvement had occurred in younger patients, those over 60 had not benefited and in 15% the procedure had exacerbated pre-existing severe dyskinesia. (*The Times* 2001; 15 March)

'Sex outside marriage OK', say Christian young people

A third of young British evangelicals believe that living together with a partner before marriage is morally acceptable, according to a survey commissioned by the Evangelical Alliance. 33% of Christian 18-35 year olds surveyed, compared with 82% of non-Christians, supported the practice. In another survey of 13-15 year olds, 82% of Anglicans thought divorce was acceptable and 85% of Roman Catholics disagreed with their church's teaching on sex outside marriage. (*Daily Telegraph* 2001; 14 March, *The Times* 2001; 7 May)

Women Doctors under stress

Medicine is a high-pressure profession, and a new study has shown that suicide rates among women doctors are on the increase. The report in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* found that the suicide rate was 13.6 per 100,000 women doctors per year between 1991 and 1995, double the national rate of 6.3 in the general female population. The male doctor suicide rate was higher (14.3 per 100,000), but only two thirds that of the male average of 21. (*Electronic Telegraph* 2001; 15 March)

Ban on genetic testing

Insurance Companies have brought in a two-year moratorium on the use of genetic tests for life insurance policies under £300,000. The Association of British Insurers (ABI) said that the limit was necessary to stop individuals testing positive for genetic illnesses from taking out unusually large policies. The move falls short of the three-year moratorium for all policies under £500,000 recommended by the Human Genetics Commission. (*The Times* 2001; 2 May 2001)

Pill cover-up

An investigative team from the Dutch radio station VPRO has unearthed the fact that the pill manufacturer Wyeth had shelved a 1997 study said to indicate clear increases in the risks of developing deep venous thrombosis in several third generation pills. Although the 1995 pill scare subsided, in part due to a political and legal offensive by the three main parties concerned (Wyeth, Schering and Organon), observers have noticed continued discrepancy between industry-sponsored surveys of the third generation pills and the research findings of independent scientists. (*BMJ* 2001; 10 March)

The real cost of mistakes

Patients are claiming £3.9bn in compensation from the NHS according to a National Audit Office official report. The figure has increased seven-fold in the last five years and more than 20,000 are suing for negligence. The rising backlog of claims now amounts to 10% of the £40bn annual NHS budget in England – and could pay for 31 new hospitals. In response, Lord Phillips, the country's most senior civil judge, has advocated a state-funded no-fault compensation system, to speed up claims and reduce costs. (*Metro* 2001; 3 May, *The Times* 2001; 21 May)

Morning-after-pill legal challenge

A pro-life group has been granted permission to bring a high court action before the end of July aimed at stopping over-the-counter sales of the abortifacient morning-after-pill levonelle-2. The Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) is arguing that the new move flouts the Offences against the Person Act 1861 which prohibits the administration of drugs with the intention to procure miscarriage. Levonelle-2, which was previously only available on a doctor's prescription, has been on sale from pharmacists since January. (*The Times* 2001; 3 May)

Is gay orientation really fixed?

New Research has challenged the claim that sexual orientation is fixed in childhood and cannot change. Columbia University Professor Robert Spitzer presented his findings on 200 homosexuals who claimed to have changed their orientation, at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in New Orleans, concluding that 66% of the men and 44% of the women had achieved 'good heterosexual functioning'. The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders in 1973. (*Daily Telegraph* 2001; 10 May)

Unhappy doctors

UK doctors are unhappy because they are overworked, underpaid, inadequately supported, and because politicians are stoking patients' expectations. These are the findings of a poll run by the *British Medical Journal* and answered by 1,400 doctors in 90 countries. Furthermore 85% of 38,000 GPs polled by the General Practitioners' Committee (GPC) of the British Medical Association are ready to resign from the NHS in twelve months if nothing is done to address the problems. (*BMJ* 2001; 19 May and 9 June). A similar demand to make bricks without straw prompted an earlier exodus, but only after some significant struggles. (Exodus 5:1-21)

Abortion funding ban upheld

President Bush's ban on taxpayers' funds going to overseas groups that perform or promote abortion has been upheld by 218 votes to 210 by the US House of Representatives. (*BMJ* 2001; 2 June)