

The Lancet eats humble pie

At long last *The Lancet* has confessed it got Dr John Snow wrong. Snow, famous for finding the cause of cholera, found a foe in Thomas Wakley, founding-editor of *The Lancet*, who in an 1855 editorial dismissed Snow's work in no uncertain terms: 'In riding his hobby very hard, he has fallen down through a gully-hole ...' and 'Has he any facts to show in proof? No!' 'We were perhaps somewhat overly negative' says the current editor. Somewhat. (*Lancet* 2013;381:1269-1270. See *Triple Helix* 2013;56:14-15 on Snow's work)

When in Rome

If you ever visit Rome, pause for thought by the Capitoline statue of the city's mythical founders, the abandoned twins Romulus and Remus, being suckled by a she-wolf. Ancient Rome allowed infanticide. Could we likewise contemplate a way of life that kills unwanted babies? Alberto Giubilini and Francesca Minerva, in 'After-birth abortion: why should the baby live?' suggest if abortion is allowable where the health of the fetus is irrelevant, then killing unwanted newborns is a logical development. Have they done a favour to 'scaremongering' pro-life campaigners? (*J Med Ethics* 2013;39(5) with subsequent contributors to the debate)

Dementia 'biggest challenge'

Dementia has replaced cancer as the biggest challenge facing the NHS, Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt has said. He has announced that vulnerable elderly persons will have a personal NHS worker responsible for coordinating all their health and care needs, based on a review of all aspects of later-life care with recommendations expected in the autumn. Among the measures included in the Queen's Speech was introduction of a £72,000 cap, ensuring old people will not have to sell their homes to meet later-life care bills. (*Independent*, 14 May 2013)

FGM in the UK

FGM (Female Genital Mutilation) is practised in 28 countries, mainly in parts of Africa with a strong Muslim influence. It is a UK problem too. The NHS clinic at Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea Hospital reports treating more than 100 women a year who have had their sexual organs cut or sewn up. UK residents often get round the law by shipping girls to relatives in north or east Africa. FGM is illegal in the UK but authorities believe it happens here, though as yet there have been no prosecutions. (*BBC Health*, 21 May 2013 bbc.in/14NITT4)

At risk on the streets

Sex workers in London are feeling the impact of recession according to a study by London's Westminster Council. An influx of new competition and a struggling economy is forcing them to cut prices sharply. Women working alone are accepting clients who appear dangerous, putting them at risk of rape, sexual assault, physical abuse and robbery. The report says the number of women working alone has increased considerably in recent years. Most are from Eastern Europe, South America – particularly Brazil – and South East Asia, especially China and Thailand. (*Reuters*, 12 April 2013)

New test to speed leprosy diagnosis

Leprosy (Hansen's disease) was a scourge in biblical times. Today it is treated with antibiotics with cases down 90% in the last 30 years. Nevertheless, it still lingers. India is top of the global leprosy table (127,295 new cases in 2011). Second is Brazil (33,955). Worst affected are people from remote areas where leprosy often goes undiagnosed, causing permanent damage. Now 'for the cost of an ice-cream' researchers from Rio de Janeiro have developed a cheap test, enabling early detection. (*BBC Health*, 27 April 2013 bbc.in/15ZzbAo)

Climate change: agenda item for bioethics?

Public debate on climate change has focused on human rights and distributive justice, but rarely do health or bioethical issues figure, observes Cheryl Cox Macpherson of Grenada. Writing in the journal *Bioethics*, she says, 'Instead of neglecting climate change... bioethics should explore these issues; bring transparency to the trade-offs that permit emissions to continue at current rates; and offer deeper understanding about what is at stake and what it means to live a good life in today's world.' (*Bioethics* 2013;27(6):305-8)

The new slave trade

Rape and sexual violence against women in war zones has been labelled 'the slave trade of our generation' by the Foreign Secretary William Hague. He told the G8 Summit in London in April that violation of women is all too often not just opportunistic but 'a calculated weapon of war'. The victims, he said, are all too often children. 'It is overdue that we recognise this willful evil for what it is, an offence against the rules of war and the Geneva Convention.' (*Evening Standard* comment, 11 April 2013)

Expect discrimination with Parkinson's

New research suggests that nearly half of people with Parkinson's Disease face regular discrimination: their symptoms often mistaken for drunkenness. The research is based on a survey of 2,000 people commissioned by the charity Parkinson's UK. One person in 500 people is affected by the condition in Britain. The survey found that one in ten had been verbally abused or experienced hostility in public because of their condition. Around 62% said they thought the public had a poor understanding of how the condition affects people. (*BBC Health*, 11 April 2013)

Organ donation spikes

Figures from NHS Blood and Transplant (NHSBT) say organ donation has shot up by 50% within the past five years. NHSBT says since April last year 1,200 people in the UK donated organs, helping transform 3,100 lives. But it sees no room for complacency; many families still refuse to consider organ donation when a loved one has died. CMF supports the Church-backed 'Flesh and Blood' campaign encouraging Christians to make blood and organ donations part of their giving www.fleshandblood.org (*Mail Online*, 21 April 2013)