

Still clueless about AIDS

Many British people remain 'clueless' about HIV and public knowledge has not kept pace with medical research. New data published on the 30th anniversary of the identification of the virus says many are unaware of preventative measures such as post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), and that ignorance fuels reluctance to get tested. Major defaulters are the 18-24 age range. Currently 98,400 British people have HIV. Of these 21,900 (nearly a quarter) are unaware of being infected. New cases among men who have sex with men hit a record high of 3,250 in 2012. (Report, National AIDS Trust, 23 April 2014 bit.ly/1hnEVov)

Religious music helps

We know King Saul's 'downers' lifted when listening to David's harp. Now The Gerontologist reports that for older Christians, religious music has a plethora of positive effects: decrease in anxiety about death; increases in life satisfaction, self-esteem, and sense of control over their lives. Gospel music particularly is singled out for its positive benefits. Benefits moreover know no cultural barriers: associations are similar whether black or white, male or female, and individuals of both low- and high-socioeconomic groups. (Gerontological Society of America, 18 April 2014 bit.ly/1j6DcEq)

Smart drugs 'no magic pill'

The cover story of the Spring issue of *Triple Helix* (2013) drew attention to the hazards of 'smart drugs'. A new report says their use continues to grow among students, and this is a concern say government health advisers. Side effects can include psychiatric symptoms, prolonged anxiety and digestive problems. Smart drugs are often bought online on sites hosted outside the UK. Andrea Petroczi, a professor of Public Health at Kingston University, says there is little evidence that suggests taking them actually makes people more clever. 'It's not a magic pill,' she said. (BBC Newsbeat, 8 May 2014 bbc.in/1s5OAWx)

NI: no free abortions on NHS

The High Court in London has ruled women from Northern Ireland are not legally entitled to free abortions funded by the NHS in England. More than 1,000 women each year travel from NI to have abortions in UK. This case was brought by a 15-year-old girl and her mother who live in Northern Ireland. Unlike the rest of the UK, abortion is only allowed in very restricted circumstances in Northern Ireland. As things stand people who do travel must pay for their transport, accommodation and the cost of the procedure. (BBC NI, 8 May 2014 bbc.in/1kQjQF8)

Polio spread hits emergency levels

The spread of polio is an international public health emergency, the WHO has declared. Outbreaks in Asia, Africa and Middle East are an 'extraordinary event' and require a co-ordinated international response, it says. Pakistan, Cameroon and Syria pose the greatest risk and the WHO recommends citizens of affected countries travelling abroad should carry a vaccination certificate. There were 417 recorded cases of polio worldwide for the whole of 2013. For 2014, there were already 68 cases by 30 April – up from 24 in the same period last year. (WHO Media Newsletter, May 2014 bit.ly/1n15Rxe)

Health app explosion

There are thousands of health apps, claiming to do anything from curing phobias, tracking symptoms and measuring heart rates. Can they be trusted? In 2013, the NHS launched a Health Apps Library, a 'one-stop shop' for trustworthy apps. Some 200 apps are registered and come with expert assessment and approval. Charles Lowe, president of the RSM's telemedicine and e-health section, says: 'My vision is that in two or three years' time, a GP will diagnose depression in a patient and say, "Here is an app which can help you".' (BBC Health, 4 May bbc.in/1o1ypw0)

Concern about care for dying

An audit by the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) has expressed concern about care of dying people in English hospitals. 500,000 people die in England each year, half of them in hospital; standards of care are patchy. The audit found only a fifth of hospitals provided specialist end of life care seven days a week, a decade after this was recommended. Just 45% of patients had been assessed to see if they needed artificial nutrition and 59% for hydration. Mandatory training in care of dying for doctors was only required in 19% of trusts. (RCP press release, 14 May 2014 bit.ly/1nMZ040)

Crisis in healthcare for Syrian refugees

Syrian refugees in Lebanon are unable to access crucial medical care because of a shortfall in international support, says Amnesty International. The agency says the situation is so desperate that in some cases refugees have resorted to returning to Syria to receive the treatment they need. The report, *Agonizing Choices: Syrian refugees in need of health care in Lebanon*, identifies serious gaps in the level of medical services available to refugees. In some cases Syrian refugees, including those requiring emergency treatment, have been turned away from hospitals. (Amnesty International, 21 May 2014 bit.ly/1jqh1Yb)

Beware Wikipedia

A US-based study claims that online encyclopaedia Wikipedia – the world's sixth most popular website – contains errors in nine out of ten of its health entries. The study compared entries about conditions such as heart disease, lung cancer, depression and diabetes with peer-reviewed medical research. Wikipedia is a charity and has 30 million articles in 285 languages. It can be edited by anybody, but many volunteers from the medical profession check the pages for inaccuracies, said Wikimedia UK. But the open-access nature Wikipedia 'raised concern' among doctors about reliability. (Headlines and Local News, 27 May 2014 bit.ly/1kn9Wz1)

Why the UK child death rate is high

Britain can rightly claim one of the most advanced health systems in the world, but it has one of the worst child mortality rates in Western Europe. Why? Research by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health indicates that many deaths in under-fives are due to risky behaviours, such as smoking, during pregnancy. This, it observes, is more common among women who are socially disadvantaged. The research shows that drinking during pregnancy is another key risk factor. So too, it says, is babies inhaling second-hand smoke and patterns of unsafe sleeping. (RCPCH, Why Children Die, 2 May 2014 bit.ly/1np8zh5)