

### 'Wellness': a new Gnosticism

Gnosticism was early Christianity's deadliest rival. Gnostics claimed 'secret knowledge' and insisted that slavish adherence to their beliefs or rituals guaranteed eternal happiness. Eutyclus can't help noticing resemblance between Gnostic attitudes and prescriptions of a new breed of 'wellness' bloggers. Belle Gibson, a 23-year-old Australian, claimed she beat brain cancer by cutting gluten and sugar. Her health app, downloaded 300,000 times, made serious money. Miss Gibson now admits she never had cancer and clearly knows little about nutrition. The internet is a happy hunting ground for quackery. Too many put uncritical faith in self-styled wellness gurus. *Guardian*, 22 April 2015 [bit.ly/1HuV3Fw](http://bit.ly/1HuV3Fw)

### Health as a global lens

Health, says Human Rights Watch (HRW) World Report 2015, is a 'lens' through which it's possible to observe 'compelling and disturbing themes' in a troubled world. In an editorial reproduced in *The Lancet*, HRW's Executive Director, Kenneth Roth says, 'The world has not seen this much tumult in a generation...it can seem as if the world is unravelling'. He continues: 'when one delves deeper, there is a hidden story that often does not make the headlines. That story is the health dimension of human rights.' *Lancet*, 7 February 2015:481 [bit.ly/1LW2mJL](http://bit.ly/1LW2mJL)

### Home care businesses 'fragile'

News that Saga has given its Allied Healthcare business a balance sheet value of 'nil' and put it up for sale following a loss of £220m, raises questions about the viability of the home and domiciliary sector. Most firms are tied to borough council contracts. The UK Homecare Association (UKHCA) says only one in seven councils pays at least the hourly rate of £15.74 which it reckons necessary to cover costs and make a profit of 47p an hour. *Guardian*, 19 May 2015 [bit.ly/1FIRdWH](http://bit.ly/1FIRdWH)

### 'Gay cake' row: bakers lose case

Ashers Baking Co from Antrim, Northern Ireland have lost their case, having been taken to court for refusing to supply a cake with a slogan supporting same-sex marriage. The case brought by a gay rights activist had the support of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. The judge insisted the business was not above discrimination law. The firm said they were 'extremely disappointed' and may appeal. 'The ruling suggests that all business owners will have to be willing to promote any cause or campaign, no matter how much they disagree with it,' the firm said. *BBC News*, 19 May 2015 [bbc.in/1JWuZIW](http://bbc.in/1JWuZIW)

### Social care crisis costs

Age UK claims 2.43 million bed days were lost to the NHS between June 2010 and March 2015 as people wait too long for social care. It says the cost of keeping these people in hospital is a staggering £669 million. Most of the people concerned are over 65. Numbers of patients kept in hospital unnecessarily because social care was unavailable increased by 19% between 2013/14 and 2014/15. Some 44% more patients were waiting for homecare compared to the previous year; 32.8% more patients were awaiting a nursing home place. *Age UK*, 16 June 2015 [bit.ly/1BIYSg2](http://bit.ly/1BIYSg2)

### Dying without dignity

Bad publicity surrounding the Liverpool Care Pathway caused its abandonment. So is care for dying patients better? We wonder. A new report, *Dying Without Dignity*, documents 265 complaints over poor end of life care over the past four years. No less than half were upheld. It documents many instances of poor communication, poor pain management and inadequate out-of-hours services – all matters that surely can be put right. Pro-euthanasia activists are sure to cite this report to boost their case, but should expedience be allowed to win over compassionate care? *Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman*, 20 May 2015 [bit.ly/1HTV3HF](http://bit.ly/1HTV3HF)

### E-cigarette restrictions in Wales

Opinion is divided over risks associated with e-cigarettes. Even so, Wales will ban their use in enclosed spaces under a new public order law that will come into force in 2017 (date to be announced). The ban will encompass restaurants, pubs, offices as well as lorries and taxis. Sellers will have to join a register for retailers of tobacco and e-cigarettes, a measure that aims to discourage sales to under-18s. It will be an offence to hand over tobacco and e-cigarettes to children. Tattoo parlours will also need licences. *BBC News*, 9 June 2015 [bbc.in/1GnFsyh](http://bbc.in/1GnFsyh)

### Fines 'affect care'

Is fining NHS trusts an effective way to motivate them to achieve performance targets? Some 51 trusts were fined a total of £92m in 2015. Top of the list was King's College Hospital NHS Trust (paid £8.4m in fines). Julie Wood, director of NHS Clinical Commissioners, which represents local managers, defended the system. Fines are 'about withholding money when a trust has failed to deliver against a statutory mandatory performance standard'. Chris Hopson, chief executive of NHS Providers, commented: fines were 'ultimately reducing providers' ability to hire staff and fund service improvements'. *BBC News*, 9 June 2015 [bbc.in/1Gwsdq7](http://bbc.in/1Gwsdq7)

### Smoking still kills

The government's five-year strategy to restrict tobacco use comes to an end in 2015, but anti-smoking organisations have launched a push for a renewed national plan. They want an annual levy on tobacco companies to fund mass media campaigns and stop smoking services. The report *Smoking Still Kills* was welcomed by Royal College of Physicians (RCP) president Professor Jane Dacre who called it 'a comprehensive blueprint for a smokefree society... smoking is still our biggest killer.' RCP reports that passive smoking causes over 150,000 cases of illness in children every year. *RCP news release*, 10 June 2015 [bit.ly/1JKc6EH](http://bit.ly/1JKc6EH)

### Mother cannot use dead daughter's eggs

The High Court has ruled that a 59-year-old mother cannot use her dead daughter's eggs so she can give birth to a grandchild. In a case believed to be the first of its kind, a judge ruled there was insufficient evidence that the 23-year-old woman wanted her eggs used in this way. While she consented to her eggs being stored for use after her death, she did not fill in a separate form to show how she wished her eggs to be used. *BBC News*, 15 June 2015 [bbc.in/1FWqBk2](http://bbc.in/1FWqBk2)