

## John 13 taken literally

Eutychus loves reading obituaries and one in the *BMJ* gives an account of the practice of Dr Eunice Bryant, former medical superintendent of the Christian Medical Mission, Bristol: 'She was a much loved, conscientious doctor, who also attended the down and out and homeless men in the city's Salvation Army hostel, on occasions even washing their feet'. (Source: *British Medical Journal*, 4 April 1998; 316: 1096)

## First legal PAS in USA

Following the enactment in November 1997 of Oregon's 1994 Death with Dignity Act, an 85 year old woman with metastatic breast cancer became the first known case in the USA of legal physician assisted suicide. The woman, who has not been named, swallowed prescribed barbiturates with brandy and died, in her own home, 30 minutes later. (Source: *British Medical Journal*, 4 April 1998; 316: 1037)

## Cyberspace and reality

Streetwise journalist Janet Street-Porter does not share CyberDoc's enthusiasm for the Internet. Writing in *Compuserve's* customer magazine she says: 'To solve the problems facing the planet we will have to learn to live side by side: to have dialogue face to face and to learn to give and take. Learning from a screen is a way of assimilating information, not a way of engendering debate . . . To my mind computers offer one-dimensional, drab experiences, unthreatening and facile. Give me reality any day.' (Source: *Go . . . Online*, April/May 1998, p21)

## Transfusion confusion

One Internet debate at least proves her wrong. A breakaway group of Jehovah's Witnesses has anonymously set up the 'Official Site of the Associated Jehovah's Witnesses for Reform on Blood'. In seven languages they strongly criticise the Governing Body's views on blood transfusion, which is banned for members on threat of excommunication and eternal extinction. The debate is raging on more sites, and a legal 'class action' against The Watchtower may follow. (Source: *Evangelicals Now*, March 1998 p1-2 and subsequent months)

## Drugs and crime

Home Office research reported in April showed that more than 60% of criminal suspects who agreed to be tested for illegal drugs proved positive. Testing was performed in five areas in England and Wales, and in Trafford, Manchester the figure was 78%. Overall, 20% tested were positive for heroin, 10% for cocaine and 46% for cannabis. (Source: Ian Burrell, *The Independent*, 22 April 1998)

## As old as . . . Moses?

In a slightly tongue in cheek *BMJ* correspondence about whether there is any such thing as ageing, retired consultant pathologist David Powell, who declares as a conflict of interest 'I am aged', quotes Deuteronomy 34: 7 about Moses who 'was an hundred and twenty years old when he died: his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated'. (Source: *British Medical Journal*, 16 May 1998; 316: 1531)

## Two parent households healthier for children

In a comparative observational study of morbidity and healthcare utilisation of children in households with one adult, the authors conclude: 'The study confirms the importance of single parent families as an indicator of deprivation. Children in such families should be targeted for immunisation and accident prevention.' (Source: *British Medical Journal*, 23 May 1998; 316: 1572-6)

## 1,000 extra doctors a year?

It appears the government will agree to expand medical school places by 1,000 a year because of a projected shortage of doctors in the UK in the new millennium. The potential impact on the NHS budget is enormous as doctors control most NHS resources. Such an expansion in medical student numbers would require one or more new medical schools. A challenge to CMF student outreach . . . (Source: Jeremy Laurance, *The Independent*, 6 June 1998)

## Who owns biological information?

The headlines of two adjacent stories filling a page of the *BMJ News* hint at worries about privatisation: 'Europe approves patenting of biotechnological

inventions' is one and the other is 'Private company to sequence human genome'. Eutychus has no shares of any kind and has no plans to change that policy. (Source: *British Medical Journal*, 23 May 1998; 316: 1558)

## Red light on red light zones

On 29th May, Sweden's parliament outlawed the purchase of sexual services as the most controversial element of a Bill widening protection of women against sexual abuse. It does not outlaw prostitutes but the purchase of their services and the maximum penalty is six months in prison. (Source: AP Stockholm, reported in *The Independent*, 30 May 1998)

## Valium in the 70s, Prozac in the 80s, Viagra in the 90s?

Viagra (sildenafil citrate) is a phosphodiesterase inhibitor recently launched in the USA by Pfizer for treating male erectile dysfunction, but in addition to being the fastest ever seller there on legal prescription, there are reports of a huge black market around the world. It has clearly become a recreational sex drug and has led to deaths in men with heart disease taking organic nitrates. Although not licensed yet in the UK, Eutychus has had a junk fax detailing how to get Viagra in London. (Source: Jeremy Laurance, *The Independent*, 27 May 1998)

## Quarter of a million child soldiers

R Barnem of Swedish Save the Children claims there are at least 250,000 child soldiers in the world. 'They are small, inconspicuous, expendable, and easily indoctrinated and terrorised into performing extreme acts. They can manage lightweight assault weapons, such as the AK47 . . .' (Source: personal communication reported in *British Medical Journal*, 23 May 1998; 316: 1550)

*Eutychus*