

Clampdown on Dutch 'coffee shops'

The Dutch have traditionally tolerated selling small amounts of cannabis through licensed 'coffee shops', which first emerged in the mid-1970s with the idea of creating a safe environment where adults could smoke cannabis but other illegal substances would be banned. Licensing laws limiting the social harms caused by drug tourism have put them under increasing pressure since the 1990s, and the number has fallen from around 1,200 to 700. Under a new agreement the coffee shops will become private clubs - so no tourists allowed.

(www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11647189)

Alcohol and school children

A study of 3,641 children aged 11-14 at 15 secondary schools in the north west showed that a third of 11-year-olds, rising to two-thirds of 14-year-olds, had drunk alcohol. Children happier at school, 'with positive school wellbeing', had lower odds of ever drinking alcohol, drinking often, engaging in any sexual activity, and of having sex. 'General wellbeing' had a smaller effect. The more often 13-14s drank alcohol, the more likely they were to engage in sexual activity: Children drinking once a week or more had 10-fold higher odds. (*Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy* 2010, 5:27)

Almost 500,000 new STIs

With young people most affected, there were 482,696 new cases of sexually transmitted infections in the UK in the year to August, a 3% rise from 2008 figures and continuing a 'steady upward trend'. More testing, and the use of more sensitive tests more likely to detect infections are said to explain part of the increase, but 'experts believe unsafe sexual behaviour is also part of the story'. Perhaps the new coalition government will at last bring in some truly independent advisors.

(www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-11072853)

48 hour week

The European Working Time Directive has suffered two - perhaps fatal - blows. The *BMJ* reports that the Department of Health has stopped monitoring doctor compliance with the 48 hour week, and the European Commission has stopped proceedings against Greece which broke the regulation. The President of the Royal College of Surgeons of England said: 'The inevitability of change is in the political air. Why is it taking so long?'

(*BMJ Careers* 30 October 2010: GP136)

NHS locum costs almost double

Under the Freedom of Information Act the Royal College of Surgeons asked for data on locum spending from 164 trusts, getting results from 96. These figures were then extrapolated to the whole of England, and suggested spending rose from £384 million in 2007-8 to £758 million last year. A third of the £758 million figure related to surgical posts. The President linked this to the EWTD and the Health Secretary added: 'The scale of increase in the cost of agency staff in the NHS is unacceptable. There is also a practical concern about continuity of care for patients.'

(www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-11722478)

Breaking the death taboo?

A feature helpfully asks whether traditional British 'reserve' is spoiling the chances of a good death? Professor Mayur Lakhani, GP and chair of the Dying Matters Coalition and The National Council for Palliative Care, said: 'When a significant majority of people say they want to die at home, but around 60% end their days in a hospital bed, it's clear this so-called 'reserve' is preventing a large number of people from dying how they want'. CMF would welcome greater recognition of the inevitability and often the rightness of natural death. (www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-11642250)

How many of us are gay?

The Integrated Household Survey produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) consists of core questions from six current household surveys including data from nearly 450,000 individual respondents - the biggest pool of UK social data after the census. 1.5% of adults in the UK identified themselves as Gay/Lesbian or Bisexual; 71% of people in Great Britain stated their religion was 'Christianity', 8% 'any other religion' and 21% 'no religious affiliation'. Eutyclus understands the next census due in 2011 will enquire about religion, but not sexual orientation. (www.statistics.gov.uk/pdffdir/ihs0910.pdf)

Civil partnership dissolutions increase

New ONS data reveals a substantial increase in the number of civil partnership dissolutions. In 2009, 351 were dissolved, almost double the 180 in 2008. This increase is in the context of a decrease in the number of couples entering into a civil union. The number of civil partnerships peaked at 4,869 in the first quarter of 2006, as long-standing same-sex couples took advantage of the change in the law, but last year 6,281 civil partnerships were formed in the UK, a decrease of 12% on 2008 figures. (www.statistics.gov.uk/pdffdir/cpuk0810.pdf)

The average woman would spend £15,000 on IVF

A survey by the women's fashion and lifestyle magazine *Red* asked 2,000 women aged between 30 and 45 about fertility treatment. British women are prepared to spend an average of £15,000 in order to conceive, with one in ten willing to spend over £50,000 on fertility treatment. 38 per cent of women had struggled to conceive. One in ten had sought some form of fertility treatment, with the average amount spent being £8,678. (*BioNews* 13 September 2010. www.bionews.org.uk/page_70346.asp?dinfo=evYYbiC4InfTh85o4zzmkIA5)

Human rights in China

Ending a two-day UK trade mission to China in November the Prime Minister said 'There is no secret we disagree on some issues, especially around human rights. We don't raise these issues to make us look good, or to flaunt publicly that we've done so. We raise them because the British people expect us to - and because we have sincere and deeply-held concerns.' He emphasised that, were he not in Beijing, he would have been preparing for Prime Minister's Questions. Such scrutiny forced leaders to listen to criticism and adapt their policies in response.

(www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-11723838)