

Fight against TB is still 'fragile' says WHO

Some 51 million people are alive today having been successfully treated for tuberculosis over the last 17 years, but the WHO warns the fight against TB remains fragile. 'The momentum to break this disease is in real danger. We are now at a crossroads between TB elimination within our lifetime, and millions more TB deaths,' says Dr Mario Raviglione, director of the WHO Stop TB department. TB remains a major killer. Fewer people are contracting TB but there are still 8.7 million new cases annually. (*WHO Global Tuberculosis Report 2012*. <http://bit.ly/RDfOCz>)

Euthanasia 'out of control' in the Netherlands

Euthanasia in the Netherlands is growing steeply according to September media reports. In 2011 they were up 8% to 3,695, with increases of 13% in 2009 and 19% in 2010. From 2006 to 2011 there was a steady increase: 1923, 2120, 2331, 2636, 3136 and 3695. Euthanasia accounts for 2.8% of all Dutch deaths. Euthanasia for people with early dementia doubled to 49 last year and 13 psychiatric patients were euthanised. Numbers could be much higher since not all cases are reported. (*Lancet* 2012; 380 (9845): 869-870, 8 September)

New debate about circumcision

The National Secular Society (NSS) plumbed new depths with a campaign against male circumcision. 'Why MGM and FGM are not considered equally reprehensible defies compassionate reason', NSS opined. Really? FGM (female genital mutilation) is barbaric. It's illegal in Britain, but still happens. This NSS campaign seems to have more to do with anti-religious prejudice than science and insults the legion of women who have suffered FGM. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) said in August 'health benefits of newborn male circumcision outweigh the risks': decisions about it should be left to parents. (*AAP* 2012, 28 September)

Visit the murky world of body snatchers

In a major exhibition the Museum of London (19 October 2012 to 14 April 2013) depicts the murky world of 'resurrection men'. Early nineteenth century surgeons had a stark choice: hone skills with live patients or on bodies some of which were provided by gangs who robbed graves and even murdered. The exhibition relates to excavations of a burial ground at the Royal London Hospital, uncovering a 'confusing mix of bones with extensive evidence of dissection, autopsy, amputation, bones wired for teaching, and animals dissected for comparative anatomy'. (*Museum of London* 2012, 26 October. <http://bit.ly/MGfEWI>)

Lunar end of life rite

For the price of a plot with headstone in a London graveyard it may soon be possible to have your ashes scattered in space. The scheme is the brainchild of a university graduate who thinks the service will appeal not only to space enthusiasts but also 'Orphans of Apollo'-people whose wish to go on a space mission was never fulfilled. The entrepreneur is reported to be looking for commercial partners among funeral directors and crematoriums. (*BMJ* 2012; 345: 6358, 26 September. <http://bit.ly/TPQmZP>)

High cost of alcohol-related illness in 'boomers'

A study by Alcohol Concern claims the NHS is spending more money treating alcohol-related illness in baby boomers than young people. The report found the cost of drink-related hospital admissions among 55 to 74-year-olds in 2010-11 was more than £825m. This is 10 times the figure for young people aged 16-24. Alcohol related in-patient admissions cost nearly £2bn in England, the report found. It says more than 10 million people are drinking more than recommended levels. Some 454,317 baby-boomer generation patients were treated compared with 54,682 persons under 24. (*BBC News* 2012, 12 October. <http://bbc.in/RkWRo8>)

Big rise in diabetes projected

The number of people with diabetes is set to rise by 700,000 by the end of the decade, according to new research. The analysis is based on data from the Yorkshire and Humber Public Observatory. 4.4 million people in England and Wales will have the condition by 2020, an increase of one fifth. Barbara Young, CEO of Diabetes UK, says the healthcare system is nearing breaking point in terms of its ability to care for people with diabetes, but it 'is still not too late to take the action needed to avert it.' (<http://bit.ly/QFNIhT>)

Health Secretary favours reducing abortion limit

Britain's new health secretary announced himself and sparked media debate saying he favours reducing the limit for women to have abortions from 24 weeks of pregnancy to 12. Jeremy Hunt said that after studying evidence (which he did not enumerate) he believed that 12 weeks was 'the right point.' He told the *The Times* newspaper (6 October): 'It is just my view about that incredibly difficult question about the moment that we should deem life to start.' (*Times* 2012, 2 October)

There's got to be a better way

UK researchers show few qualms about using and destroying embryos. One day Shinya Yamanaka looked into his microscope and found himself wondering: 'When I saw the embryo, I suddenly realised there was such a small difference between it and my daughters,' Yamanaka, told the *New York Times* a few years ago. 'I thought, "We can't keep destroying embryos for our research." There must be another way.' Now Yamanaka and team have successfully turned adult skin cells into the equivalent of human embryonic stem cells without using an actual embryo, research earning him a Nobel Prize. (*Slate* 2012, 9 October. <http://slate.me/PRdGWC>)

Forgiveness: good for your health

As well as soothing the soul, forgiveness can bring cardiovascular benefits, says a recent study. It measured the blood pressure and heart rate of 202 people. They were given the option of either brooding angrily over some past wrong or taking a forgiving perspective. Compared to angry ruminations, forgiveness made a significant difference to fluctuations in blood pressure. Want to protect your heart? Don't get angry, try forgiveness. (*Psychosomatic Medicine* 2012; 74:745-750)