

funding for NHS Chaplaincy

Data compiled by the National Secular Society (NSS) suggests that £29 million is spent annually on hospital chaplains. Using data obtained via the Freedom of Information Act, the NSS claims that if all NHS trusts reduced their spending on chaplaincy to match those who spent the least, £18.5 million could be saved. It is claimed that this could fund 1,000 nursing assistants each year, or a new community hospital. NSS analysis contended that some of the 'best-performing' hospitals were the ones which spent the least on chaplaincy services, leading to a proposal for hospital chaplains to be funded through charitable trusts, supported by churches and their parishioners.

Bishops in the Church of England emphasise that such expenditure is a minute proportion of the NHS budget, yet offers comprehensive care to patients at crucial moments in life (also reflected in the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence guidelines for dying patients), as well as to relatives and staff. Remarking that hospitals would be 'poorer' places without chaplains, Rt Rev Mike Hill, Bishop of Bristol, has said, 'As with much in life, the true value of our chaplains might only be appreciated if they were no longer present. Every effort ought to be made, and is being made, to resist secularist calls for chaplains to be excluded from the NHS.'

dailymail.co.uk, 28 Feb 2012;
telegraph.co.uk, 10 Feb 2012

abortion equivalent to infanticide?

A recent article in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* has argued that killing babies after birth is no different to abortion. Entitled *After-Birth Abortion: Why should the Baby Live?* the piece argues that 'the moral status of an infant is equivalent to that of a fetus in the sense that both lack those properties that justify the attribution of a right to life to an individual'. Authors Giubilini and Minerva have both worked with the journal's editor Professor Julian Savulescu, Director of the Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics. Savulescu has in the past famously argued against the doctors' right to conscientious objection.

Savulescu claimed that the authors had received death threats, but also admitted that the article may strengthen the case against abortion, saying that 'many people will argue on this basis that abortion should be recriminalised'.

CMF member Dr Trevor Stammers, Programme Director in Bioethics at St Mary's University College, commented: 'If a mother does smother her child with a blanket, we say "it doesn't matter, she can get another one." Is that what we want to happen? What these young colleagues are spelling out is what would be the inevitable end point of a road that ethical philosophers in the States and Australia have all been treading for a long time and there is certainly nothing new.'

Referring to the term 'after-birth abortion', Dr Stammers added: 'This is just verbal manipulation that is not philosophy. I might refer to abortion henceforth as antenatal infanticide.'

guardian.co.uk, 29 Feb 2012;
telegraph.co.uk, 29 Feb 2012

Christian GP appeals against sacking from Home Office

Manchester GP Dr Hans-Christian Raabe has been granted a judicial review against Home Secretary Theresa May, following his dismissal from a voluntary position on the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) in 2011. Having practised in an area where drug misuse is high, Dr Raabe had volunteered for the one day a week post, yet was dismissed before attending a single meeting. He had been clear in his opposition to 'harm reduction' approaches to dealing with drug misuse, which he believed to have failed. He was well known to be a Christian, and was widely involved in his local community.

The reason given for the withdrawal of his appointment was his contribution to a paper published in Canada in 2005, which referred to previous scientific literature looking at a possible link between homosexuality and paedophilia. Ironically, the Home Office had made the same point as the 2005 paper in one of its own documents. Dr Raabe has refused to retract his paper, saying 'I cannot retract scientific evidence...and if I did so, I would have to ask the Home Office to retract its own paper too.'

CMF Chief Executive Peter Saunders commented: 'That Dr Raabe should be sacked from his role as a drugs advisor on the basis of his expressed opinions on an entirely unrelated issue (homosexuality) is itself at very least unfair. But the fact that the data he quoted were actually derived from peer-reviewed scientific journal articles (including one quoted approvingly by the Home Office itself!), and on a matter where experts agree that there is a diversity of learned opinion, makes his dismissal both outrageous and inexcusable.'

In a democratic and multicultural society, people should be free to hold, express and act in accordance with their beliefs and convictions rather than being pushed out of public life.

Dr Raabe has been treated appallingly by the Home Office. I wish him all the very best in his appeal.'

dailymail.co.uk 28 January 2012;

cmfblog.org.uk 29 January 2012

three banned from carrying out abortions after sex-selection allegations

The General Medical Council (GMC) has suspended Dr Raj Mohan, who was filmed agreeing to authorise an abortion requested solely because of the gender of the baby. The GMC is clear that such action is not only illegal, but puts at risk the registration of any doctors involved. Two other doctors have been barred from authorising or carrying out abortions following similar revelations.

Secret filming at clinics in Birmingham and Manchester uncovered the consultations. In one, a woman who said she was 'not looking to have this baby at the moment' because it was a girl, was told by the doctor 'I don't ask questions, if you want a termination, you want a termination.'

A further case has come to light in which a counsellor working for the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) agreed to book an abortion in the full knowledge that the reason given was the gender of the baby. In this instance, the clinic manager became aware of the case, and the booking was cancelled.

telegraph.co.uk 24 February 2012; 11 March 2012

Stephen Hawking turns 70

On 8 January 2012, famous scientist Stephen Hawking was preparing to give a 'rare public lecture' celebrating his 70th birthday in Cambridge. 49 years ago, no medical practitioner could have predicted or expected this to happen, given he had just been diagnosed with a form of Motor Neurone Disease (MND). He was given a few years to live, but the Professor of Physics has defied all medical expectations since.

He has continued to work, becoming world renowned in the study of black holes and the early universe. Kitty Ferguson has written about his life and work, describing him as an energetic person with the spirit of fun and adventure. She commends him on his personality and willpower in dealing with his disability; 'The fact that he is able to live with his disability and it's just the most astounding, good-humoured, dismissal of it. It's not as though he's triumphing over it, it's just as though it's not there'.

Professor Kip Thorne, formerly of the California Institute of Technology and a collaborator with Hawking, also spoke of the good that came out of Professor Hawking when he lost the use of his hands. 'He compensated by training himself to manipulate complex shapes and topologies in his mind at great speed. That ability has enabled him to see the solutions to deep physics problems that nobody else could solve, and that he probably would not have been able to solve, himself, without his newfound skill.'

Away from physics, Hawking published *The Grand Design* in 2010, in which he argues against the existence of God. Oxford Professor of

Mathematics John Lennox published a critique of this approach entitled *God and Stephen Hawking: Whose design is it anyway?* in 2011.

guardian.co.uk 8 January 2012

Tony Nicklinson case to be heard

Stroke victim Tony Nicklinson has been granted permission to go ahead with a legal case in which he hopes to get permission for a doctor to one day end his life. He seeks to establish that a 'common law defence of necessity' would be admissible against any murder charge arising from such action. Having suffered a stroke in 2005, Mr Nicklinson suffers from 'locked-in' syndrome, and can only communicate via blinks.

The Ministry of Justice had tried to stop the case proceeding, arguing that such a decision was for parliament rather than the courts. David Perry QC, representing the Ministry of Justice at an earlier hearing argued that Mr Nicklinson 'is saying the court should positively authorise and permit as lawful the deliberate taking of his life...That is not, and cannot be, the law of England and Wales unless Parliament were to say otherwise.'

Mr Nicklinson's wife said 'If you knew the kind of person he was before, life like this is unbearable for him. He realises as he gets older things are going to get worse...20 years ago Tony would have died. But people are being kept alive with such terrible conditions. Medical practice has become so much better but the law has not progressed with that'. ■

telegraph.co.uk, 12 March 2012