

Quality of death index 2015

In the aftermath of Rob Marris's Assisted Dying Bill, one upshot is increased calls for better palliative care. That is heartening. Eutyclus notes the UK is ranked best among 80 countries for its care of dying people, but nothing is beyond improvement. The UK owes its standing, not least, to the hospice movement (pioneered here by Christians and widely imitated). One oft-repeated scenario is that legalised euthanasia would spell the death of the hospice movement. *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, 6 October 2015 bit.ly/1Gurckq

Access for mental health sufferers

People with mental ill health die younger and have poor physical health compared to the general population, says the Nuffield Trust. People with serious mental illnesses, such as psychosis or bipolar disorder, die on average ten to 17 years earlier than the general population. Nuffield notes with approval efforts towards 'parity of esteem' between mental and physical health, but calls for better understanding of how people with mental health issues access health services. One in six UK adults has a mental health condition with one in 100 suffering 'severe' mental illness. *Nuffield Trust*, 14 October 2015 bit.ly/1GepcLj

Holy smoke

Not everyone is keen on incense, even if its use in the Tabernacle and Jerusalem Temple affords it some biblical warrant. Eutyclus couldn't help noticing how church legal eagles went up in arms when draft measures to outlaw so-called 'legal highs' (see pages 14-16 for more info) went public. Legislation appeared to rule out use of incense in churches and temples, leaving purveyors on the wrong side of the law. Eventually it's emerged that this was yet another of those phony media storms in the proverbial. *Daily Telegraph*, 16 September 2015 bit.ly/1Lm1Pfm

WHO and Ebola fallout

The Ebola crisis was a 'defining moment' for WHO according to an interim report of a panel inquiring into its handling of the crisis. Ebola 'not only exposed organizational failings' but also 'short-comings in International Health Regulations'. Ebola began to spread in December 2013 but it took until August 2014 for the WHO to sound the global alarm. The report recommends abandonment of planned zero budget increases (over 75% of WHO's Programme budget comes from voluntary funds). It endorses plans for a stronger global emergency workforce and a contingency fund to enable rapid response. *WHO*, July 2015 bit.ly/1JS5IQe

WHO wins plaudits too

Ebola may have exposed the frailties of the WHO, but the agency has its success stories too. The fight against Malaria is one example. A study claims 700 million cases were prevented since WHO implemented concerted efforts against Malaria from 2000. A report published in the journal *Nature* claims a 50% fall in cases across the African continent. The key strategy sounds simple: installation of bed nets. WHO's director general Margaret Chan said: 'Global malaria control is one of the great public health success stories of the past 15 years.' *BBC News*, 17 September 2015 bbc.in/1LyD5Am

15 million get HIV treatments

The goal of getting HIV treatments to 15 million people by the end of 2015 was met nine months ahead of schedule, the UN Aids agency claims. The UN first set goals to combat HIV in 2000. At that time 700,000 people were receiving antiretroviral drugs. The report says since 2001 the global response to HIV has averted 30 million new infections and nearly eight millions Aids-related deaths. Over this period HIV infections have fallen from an annual 2.6 to 1.8 million. UN Aids hopes the HIV epidemic can be ended by 2030. *UN Aids*, July 2015 bit.ly/1UXBjR8

Sodden oldies

GPs are less attuned than they might be to 'unsafe' levels of alcohol intake by over 65s. New research says one in five older people drink too much. London is the biggest problem region and heavier drinkers tend to be relatively affluent males. For older people drinking too much contributes to confusion and falls, in addition to the normal health issues caused by alcohol abuse. Among the top 5% of biggest drinkers, men were consuming more than 49 units a week - more than a bottle of whisky. *BBC Health*, 25 August 2015 bbc.in/1U1JJsO

E-cigarettes: evidence, not opinion, please

Public Health England has issued a report claiming e-cigarettes are 95 per cent less harmful than conventional tobacco. 'Fie' say experts from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and the University of Liverpool. *The Lancet* published an editorial by Professors Martin McKee and Simon Capewell, insisting there was no reliable that evidence showing e-cigarettes are safe. Moreover, claims that they do not provide a 'gateway' to tobacco smoking don't stand up. The PHE report, they say, is flawed, based on inconclusive evidence, and tainted by vested interests. *The Lancet*, 26 September 2015 bit.ly/1MDAc6h

Only one life

Obadiah Slope thought he'd delivered the ultimate curse, telling the Proudies, 'I hope you live forever' (Barchester). Not everyone sees it that way and many go to amazing lengths to extend life or even make a comeback after death. A two year-old Thai girl, Matheryn Naovaratpong, victim of brain cancer, has become the youngest person to be cryogenically preserved. Her parents keep her bedroom in readiness for her cure and return. Christians have a certain hope for this life and the next that's not dependent on science fiction (1 Corinthians 15). *BBC News*, 15 October 2015 bbc.in/1N5r62A

Strengthening FGM safeguarding

In our Summer 2014 issue we drew attention to how 125 million girls and women suffer having experienced Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). We pointed out, moreover, that it happens in the UK as well. Now under regulations issued by the Department of Health, professionals are obliged to report new-found cases - ideally by the end of the next working day. While this is an important step, globally much still needs to be done with FGM practised in at least 29 countries, affecting up to three million girls and women worldwide annually. *Department of Health*, 30 October 2015 bit.ly/1MBuzHx