

*In brief***Study warns of CJD epidemic:**

American scientists have shown in experiments with mice that bovine spongiform encephalopathy and variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD) are almost certainly caused by the same infectious agent. The research team, which published its findings in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (1999;96:15137-42) say that its findings "raise greater concern that a large section of the UK population may be at considerable risk" of developing CJD.

UK helps to reduce debt in developing countries:

The chancellor of the exchequer has announced that the United Kingdom will write off all debts owed by the most impoverished countries. The initiative could include 41 countries. Jubilee 2000, the campaign for debt relief, said that the total sum could be £1.6bn (\$2.56bn). (See editorial by Heath and others.)

Medical mistakes kill veterans:

US federal investigators have documented almost 3000 medical mistakes, resulting in 700 deaths, in less than two years at veterans hospitals around the country, a new report says.

Court backs tobacco advertising ban in UK:

The Court of Appeal last month overturned an injunction preventing the UK government from introducing a ban on tobacco advertisements on billboards and in newspapers and magazines. The tobacco companies said that they would appeal to the House of Lords.

UK private hospital market increases:

Revenue of independent hospitals and clinics in the United Kingdom (excluding NHS pay beds) was an estimated £1573m (\$2517m) in 1998, up by 10% on the previous year and the highest level of growth since 1991, according to *Laing's Healthcare Market Review* (Laing and Buisson, £160, tel: 020 7833 9123).

News *extra* 

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BMJ set to sign with PubMed Central, JSTOR, and WorldSpace

Tony Delamothe *BMJ*

Within the next few weeks, the *BMJ* expects to join three separate initiatives, which together will make more of the journal available to many more people. It will be the first general medical journal to join PubMed Central, a project masterminded by the US National Institutes of Health to make the results of original research in the life sciences freely available to everyone via the internet (*BMJ* 1999;318:1637-8).

Electronic versions of research articles will be transferred to the National Institutes of Health at the same time as they are published on the *BMJ*'s website. PubMed Central will be integrated with PubMed, Medline's electronic interface. Researchers will be able to

access the full text of studies either from PubMed Central or by following links back to the *BMJ*'s website.

As now, users will need to visit the journal's website for related editorials, commentaries, and rapid responses and to print out copies of the article that look like those in the paper journal.

The *BMJ* is set to inaugurate the medical collection of JSTOR, whose goal is "to benefit all parties in the field of scholarly communication by providing centralised storage and archiving of important journals in electronic form." In the *BMJ*'s case, this means digitising all the journals between 1840 and December 1993 (when the *BMJ*'s own online archive begins).

JSTOR, a not-for-profit organisation set up by the Andrew W Mellon Foundation in 1995, has already assembled a collection of 117 journals in the humanities and social sciences.

The electronic versions are created at no costs to the journals; revenue comes from library subscribers—currently nearly 500 worldwide.

By contrast, WorldSpace wants to make the most recent issue of the *BMJ* freely available to health professionals responsible for the health care of the world's most disadvantaged people.

The company was founded "to provide direct satellite delivery of digital audio communications and multimedia services to the emerging world" and depends on satellites to deliver signals to portable receivers (costing about £150 (\$250) each).

Although WorldSpace is a commercial company, it has set aside 5% of the satellite's capacity for good works. □

Angolans face threat of severe malnutrition

Peter Moszynski *Luanda, Angola*

Despite the Angolan government's recent military successes against the Unita rebels, there has been little respite in the suffering of the civilian population of Angola, and the situation is likely to deteriorate rapidly once again if sufficient assistance is not forthcoming.

A major concern continues to be malnutrition in many areas. Although there has been

an improvement in certain provinces—such as Malange, where malnutrition rates have gone down from 32% in June to 22% in September—the outlook for much of the country remains extremely poor.

Unicef nutritionist Peter Hailey explains: "The nutritional situation of vulnerable groups in Angola continued to worsen throughout 1999, peaking around June and July. In the last months of 1999 the situation has improved but remains extremely worrying."

"The improvement has been due to a number of factors, principally the relatively improved access for humanitarian aid. In recent weeks the intensity of the

fighting has also reduced. However, several factors also point towards a continuation of high levels of malnutrition," Mr Hailey said.

"Some of the most intense fighting took place during the planting season. The resulting displacement of large numbers of people and reduced access to land points towards a greatly reduced harvest next year. We are moving into the 'hunger season' during which access to food is usually lower."

"Therefore the recent improvements may not continue in the coming months. Indeed they may actually deteriorate unless access to humanitarian aid and freedom of movement improve. Vulnerable groups in all parts of the country will be facing the threat of severe malnutrition and increased child mortality," he added.

Recent screening in the town of Negage indicates a malnutrition rate of 40%. The hospital has insufficient beds for all the patients, despite children sleeping three to a cot. Many of the children are suffering from both acute and chronic malnutrition.

The widespread laying of landmines and war-induced population movement has meant that less than 4% of the land is cultivated. □



Young boys in Luanda search rubbish bins to find food

AP PHOTO/ARMANDO FRANCA