

## In brief

### Gap in health research funding persists:

Of the 1200 drugs that reached the global market between 1975 and 1997, only 13 were for tropical infectious diseases that primarily affect the world's poor people, a new report says. The *10/90 Report on Health Research 2001-2002* can be accessed from the Global Forum for Health Research's website, [www.globalforumhealth.org](http://www.globalforumhealth.org)

### United States awards first grants for stem cell research:

The National Institutes of Health have disbursed \$3.5m (£2.4m; €3.8m) in grants to four institutions so that they can make stem cell lines available to researchers worldwide. The institutions are the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation in Madison; Cellsaurus, a subsidiary of BresaGen in Athens, Georgia; ES Cell International of Melbourne, Australia; and the University of California at San Francisco.

### United Kingdom issues hazard notice over heart surgery device:

The Medical Devices Agency has issued a hazard notice after a fatal incident at the Northern General Hospital, Sheffield, in which an instrument used in open heart surgery broke. A patient died after part of the plastic head of a Sulzer Carbomedics heart valve tester broke off during a heart valve replacement operation.

**Smoking cessation aids just as effective when bought over the counter:** Smokers achieved just as good success rates in giving up smoking when they used nicotine chewing gum and patches bought over the counter as when they were prescribed by a doctor, a new study says (*Addiction* 2002;97:505-16).

### GMC reviews issues raised by election of Dr Jennifer Colman:

The General Medical Council has set up an independent external review to look at the issues that have arisen since Dr Jennifer Colman was elected to the council. Dr Colman was struck off the medical register in 1987 (*BMJ* 2000;320:1357) and had to stand down from a disciplinary panel last year (*BMJ* 2001;322:1565).

## Car makers press Europe for voluntary agreement on safety

Rory Watson *Brussels*

Motor manufacturers, the European Union, and road safety campaigners are at odds over the best way to reduce the annual carnage from road crashes. They are debating whether legislation or a voluntary agreement with the industry is the best way forward.

For the moment the balance is tilted towards the voluntary agreement recently negotiated between the industry and the European Commission. The commission, manufacturers, and EU governments have endorsed it. It is also supported by many members of the European parliament.

But the real test comes next month when the whole European parliament will vote on the two choices. Road safety campaigners are pressing MEPs to support legislation. If they win, the commission will be under strong political pressure to table the necessary proposals later this year.

The debate centres on how to ensure that vehicles have the best safety features to reduce the risk of death or serious injury to pedestrians and cyclists hit by cars.

The motor industry favours a voluntary agreement. The European Automobile Manufacturers' Association maintains that such an arrangement enables certain safety features to be implemented more quickly.

A spokesman pointed out that, although the agreement is not yet in force, one of its provisions—a

ban on "bull bars" (extra reinforcement on the front of vehicles)—had been applied by manufacturers in Europe since January.

However, the Brussels based European Transport Safety Council, which is supported by several non-governmental organisations—notably the European Public Health Alliance, the European Disability Forum, and the Federation of European Road Traffic Victims—is challenging the efficacy of the voluntary tests, which have been devised by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre. (See p1109.) □



The motor industry claims that a voluntary ban on "bull bars" (pictured) has been successfully applied since January

## WMA protests at claim that it planned to expel Israeli doctors

Lynn Eaton *London*

An international row has broken out after reports in the *Jerusalem Post* last month said that the World Medical Association (WMA) might be considering expulsion of the Israel Medical Association—a rumour vehemently denied by the WMA.

The WMA and other health organisations around the world have received thousands of protesting email messages from Jewish doctors worldwide after the press report. The emails even crashed the WMA's computer system.

But the WMA, which held its council meeting in Divonne-les-Bains, France, last week, denied it had any intention of expelling the Israel Medical Association because of the conflict in the Palestinian territories.

The WMA's secretary general, Dr Delon Human, said it had

received more than 20 000 email protests from around the world.

"On Monday 29 April alone the WMA received 17 000 emails, and as a result its IT system crashed," he said. "This has all been the result of one false and damaging story."

He denied that the WMA had any intention of expelling the Israeli association, but he added that it was discussing "concerns that patients were not receiving health care in the Middle East and our wish to see physicians and health personnel protected in areas of conflict."

Events began a week earlier, on 24 April, when Judy Siegel-Itzkovich of the *Jerusalem Post*, who also writes for the *BMJ*, reported on a meeting in Vienna of the European Forum of Medical Associations, part of the World Health Organization.

Her report said the Israel Medical Association was "in danger of being ousted from the WMA" because of the "ongoing political campaign against Israel."

The motion that was finally passed unanimously at the meeting in Divonne-les-Bains called on all sides in the Middle East conflict to ensure the continuation of essential medical services by allowing unrestricted freedom of movement to doctors and other healthcare personnel.

The resolution stressed that all medical missions, personnel, and units were entitled to immunity and to the assurance of unrestricted freedom of movement while they were exclusively engaged in carrying out their duties.

But it also denounced the use of ambulances and healthcare facilities for hostile purposes. And it denounced all acts of terror "such as the indiscriminate killing of civilians and spread of fear among the general public." □

See [www.wma.net](http://www.wma.net)