

bmj.com news roundup

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Oregon's residents to vote on universal health care

The US state of Oregon is moving closer to providing an all expenses paid, "universal" health-care coverage for all its residents. Residents are due to vote on the issue—known both as "Measure 23" and "Health Care for All"—during the mid-term congressional elections on 5 November.

The measure is controversial, however, as it would be financed largely by increases in payroll and personal income taxes. If the law were passed, Oregon would become the first state in the United States to grant its citizens comprehensive health care (what Americans call "socialised medicine").

Currently, about 423 000 of Oregon's 3.3 million people lack health insurance, and about 70 000 of these are children.

Under the Oregon plan, every person who lives in Oregon, as well as many of those who work in the state but live elsewhere, would be eligible for comprehensive healthcare coverage without having to make a contribution to the cost of care, at the time of treatment.

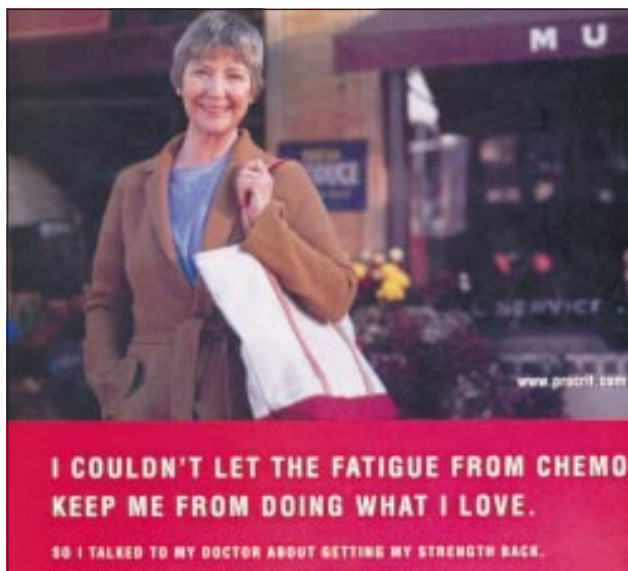
Patients would not be penalised for pre-existing conditions and could choose to see any state registered and certified healthcare practitioner, including specialists, without going through a "gatekeeper."

Deborah Josefson *Nebraska*

New helpline set up by doctors for doctors

A new confidential and anonymous helpline run voluntarily by doctors has been set up for doctors in England.

The Doctors' SupportLine offers informal support for doctors with any concerns—from burnout, depression, and anxiety to work difficulties and family worries. It has been set up jointly by the charity Primary Care Mental Health and Education and the self help group Doctors' Support Network, with a grant



A fifth of Americans contact their doctor as a result of direct to consumer drug advertising

One in five Americans says that direct to consumer advertising prompted them to call or visit their doctor to discuss an advertised drug, a new consumer survey has found.

The August PharmTrends survey by the US market research firm Ipsos-NPD also shows that 50% of consumers recalled seeing advertising for prescription drugs, such as the one for epoetin alfa (Procrit) above, in the previous 12 months. This was up from 47% in the first PharmTrends survey, conducted in February 2002.

Sildenafil (Viagra) tops the list for advertisement recall among consumers: 98% of purchasers of Viagra remembered seeing an advertisement for the product. Celecoxib (Celebrex), with a recall of 78% of buyers, came at the bottom of the top 10 drugs.

PharmTrends surveyed 25 182 respondents, a statistically representative sample of the US population.

Scott Gottlieb *New York*

from the Department of Health.

Although there are other telephone health support services for doctors, the founders of SupportLine wanted to offer doctors something different. Their helpline is staffed by doctors, many of whom have experienced problems in their own lives, and there is no ongoing counselling. The service is simply a one off access point that offers support and anonymity.

At the moment the only funding is for the helpline in England, but as soon as funding is available SupportLine will be extended to doctors in other parts of the United Kingdom.

Zosia Kmietowicz *London*

The helpline is open 36 hours a week from 6 pm to 10 pm Monday to Friday, all day Sunday: 0870 765 0001.

Teenagers catch malaria from local mosquitoes near Washington, DC

Two cases of *Plasmodium vivax* malaria near the US capital seem to have been acquired locally from indigenous mosquitoes, not from malaria-carrying mosquitoes escaping from Dulles international airport.

A 19 year old woman and a 15 year old boy were given diagnoses of malaria in August in Loudoun county, Virginia, near the capital. Neither patient had been out of the country or had other risk factors for malaria. It is thought that they contracted the disease from local mosquitoes, which had acquired it from

an infected traveller or resident. Both patients were treated and recovered.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported 1402 cases of malaria in the United States in 2000, almost all of which were acquired abroad. Only four were not, and of these two were blood-borne infections and two were congenitally acquired. None was acquired locally from indigenous mosquitoes. Malaria, once endemic in the United States, was eradicated in 1954.

Janice Hopkins Tanne *New York*

First Belgian to use new euthanasia law provokes storm of protest

Mario Verstraete, a 39 year old from Ghent, became the first person in Belgium to use the country's new legislation legalising euthanasia and immediately prompted media criticism.

Mr Verstraete, who had multiple sclerosis, died on 30 September after being given an injection by his doctor, just eight days after the law came into force.

Critics, mainly in the Flemish media, claim that the manner of his death did not comply with the procedures set out in the legislation and that his doctor could run the risk of prosecution.

They point out that after making his decision, Mr Verstraete should have been given 30 days to think the matter over and that as the act only took effect on 22 September, this provision had not been respected.

Rory Watson *Brussels*

Doctor believed that patients should be told what was best for them

A gynaecologist facing a string of charges of failure to obtain consent for hysterectomies believed that patients should be told what was best for them and not be