



## NEWS

## Seven days in medicine: 7-13 February 2018

### GP access

#### Parents are urged to use pharmacies to relieve pressure

NHS England launched a campaign on 12 February to promote the use of pharmacies for minor health problems in children, saying that parents could get more timely advice by going to a pharmacist first instead of their GP. The Royal College of General Practitioners welcomed the campaign and said that it was in line with its own guidance. Mike Linney, registrar for the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, said that the campaign could reduce pressure on GP services but that if parents had serious concerns about their child they should call NHS 111 or attend the emergency department. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.k672)

#### Rapid access schemes may divert GPs from more complex patients

Policies designed to segment general practice that typically emphasise faster access for specific patients can risk diverting the stretched GP workforce from managing people with complex or unknown illnesses and can keep them out of hospital, a report warned. The Nuffield Trust found no clear evidence of money savings from “rapid access” services targeted at patients who prioritise quick and convenient appointments, such as walk-in centres, smartphone apps, or video consultations; and some evidence showed that these can increase overall costs.

### Regulation

#### Bawa-Garba will challenge High Court ruling

The trainee paediatrician Hadiza Bawa-Garba will appeal the High Court’s ruling to strike her from the UK medical register and may also appeal her 2015 conviction for gross negligence manslaughter over the death of 6 year old Jack Adcock. Bawa-Garba has instructed James Laddie QC, who specialises in employment and discrimination law, and Sarah Hannett to represent her after a campaign to crowdfund advice on appeals, which had raised more than £330 000 (€371 000; \$464 000) by 8 February. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.k655)

#### UK accepts second test to prove doctors’ language skills

The General Medical Council said that it now accepts an additional test as proof of English language skills. The regulator began accepting the Occupational English Test (OET) as proof of a doctor’s language competency, in addition to the International English Language Test System, on 6 February. The OET is designed for healthcare professionals and includes real workplace scenarios. It is already recognised by the UK’s

Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Ireland, and authorities in Australia and New Zealand. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.k666)

#### Doctors are warned against hugging patients

The Medical Defence Union warned UK doctors about the dangers of overstepping boundaries when comforting patients. Ellie Mein, a medicolegal adviser at the union, warned that physical contact can easily be misinterpreted by patients, particularly if coupled with other words or actions that they interpret as inappropriate. “This can trigger a complaint or even lead to an investigation by the General Medical Council or the police,” she warned. The union said that doctors should use their judgment and their knowledge of a patient before offering any physical comfort.

### Bullying

#### NHS trust is condemned for “appalling” treatment of whistleblowers

An NHS trust “bullied and harassed” staff who raised concerns about poor care and swingeing staffing cuts, an independent review found. The report, commissioned by the regulator NHS Improvement, identified “appalling instances of staff treatment” at Liverpool Community Health Trust from 2010 to 2014 as the trust tried to suppress systemic failings that had caused harm to patients. The trust had failed to learn from serious incidents that occurred because of failings in care provision, the report found. These included the deaths of as many as 19 people in custody at HMP Liverpool. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.k653)

#### Behaviour is “as important as clinical skills”

The way doctors treat their peers is as important as their clinical skills, medical leaders said. Speaking at a conference on 8 February, Henrietta Hughes, the national “freedom to speak up” guardian, said that doctors should be judged on both their competence and their conduct. Referring to bullying behaviours displayed by some doctors, she said, “We know that the mythology is such that there are some people whose surgical skills are so ‘unique’ and ‘special’ that we will tolerate their poor conduct.” (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.k665)

### HPV vaccine

#### Charity threatens legal action over “inequality”

Lawyers for the Throat Cancer Foundation wrote to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation threatening legal action, after Public Health England recommended that men under 45 who have sex with men should be offered the human

papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine but that boys should not. Jamie Rae, founder of the charity, likened the move to locking the stable door after the horse has bolted. “To be offered a vaccine later in life is not equal to the protection offered to females, who are typically immunised in their first year of high school,” he said. “Pre-sexual debut vaccination is irrefutably best practice.”

## Parkinson's disease

### Warn patients about impulse control disorders

Adults with Parkinson's disease using dopaminergic treatment and their family and carers should be given information when starting treatment, and then at least yearly, about the risk of impulse control disorders such as compulsive gambling, hypersexuality, binge eating, and obsessive shopping, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence said in a quality standard.<sup>1</sup> Patients should be referred to physiotherapy if they have problems with movement or balance; to an occupational therapist if they have difficulties with everyday activities such as dressing, cooking, and working; or to a speech and language therapist if they have problems with speech, swallowing, or drooling.

## Research news

### Opioid use is linked to risk of serious infections

Prescription opioid use is associated with a higher risk for serious invasive pneumococcal diseases such as meningitis and

pneumonia, a study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* found. The association was strongest in opioids that were long acting (adjusted odds ratio 1.87 (95% confidence interval 1.24 to 2.82)) or high potency (1.72 (1.32 to 2.25)) or were used at high doses. Editorialists wrote, “Before prescribing an opioid, the clinician should carefully consider all reasonable alternative approaches to pain relief. It now seems that decision making also should take into account the risk for serious infections.” (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.k657)

### “High holidays” are linked to risk of fatal traffic crashes

The popular US annual counterculture holiday “4/20,” which is celebrated by mass consumption of cannabis at 4 20 pm on 20 April, is associated with an increased risk of fatal traffic crashes, especially in drivers aged under 20, a study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* found. The greatest absolute increases in risk during the so called “high holidays” were seen in the states of New York (excess of 36), Texas (excess of 32), and Georgia (excess of 29). The researchers concluded, “Policy makers may wish to consider these risks when liberalising marijuana laws, paying particular attention to regulatory and enforcement strategies to curtail drugged driving.” (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.k661)

1 National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Parkinson's disease: quality standard QS164. Feb 2018. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/QS164>.

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