



NEWS

Seven days in medicine: 9-15 January 2019

GP premises

Patients fear being overheard in surgeries

Over half (58%) of patients who answered a Patients Association poll were worried about being overheard when speaking to a GP receptionist, telephoning their practice, or consulting with the GP, as consulting rooms are not adequately soundproofed. They also said that surgeries were hard to access, particularly for disabled people, and that waiting rooms were outdated and too small. The state of some GP premises may breach legislation on data protection, disability, or health and safety, the association warned. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.l114)

NHS

Productivity outstrips rest of economy

NHS productivity in 2016-17 grew by 3% in England, more than treble the 0.8% achieved in the wider UK economy, data from the Office for National Statistics showed. Health service productivity in England also outpaced that of health services elsewhere in the UK: the health service achieved 2.5% growth overall. "These figures are a testimony to the dedication and skill of NHS staff," said Simon Stevens, NHS England chief executive, who added that the NHS long term plan would continue to "bear down on waste."

Migraine drug is not cost effective, says NICE

Erenumab (Aimovig; Novartis), a new drug for preventing migraine, cannot be recommended for NHS use because it is not cost effective, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) advised in draft guidance. No evidence found erenumab to be more effective than botulinum toxin type A for people with chronic migraine, which NICE already recommends. Erenumab is listed as costing around £5000 (€5640; \$6440) a year, although an agreement with its manufacturer would have made it available at a discount if NICE had recommended the drug.

Mental health

Workforce crisis must be tackled, says BMA

Efforts to deal with the workforce crisis in UK mental health services must be ramped up, said Gary Wannan, deputy chair of the BMA consultants committee, in response to a damning report from the Public Accounts Committee.¹ The report found that only three in 10 young people with a mental health condition received NHS funded treatment in 2017-18, and many more faced long waits for treatment. Wannan highlighted a lack of detail on workforce issues in the government's 10 year NHS plan. "The £2.3bn [€2.59bn; \$2.96bn] allocation for mental

health as part of the long term plan is not proportionate to the amount needed," he said.

Abortion

Court allows challenge to clinic censorship zone

The Court of Appeal granted permission to hear a challenge against a council's public spaces protection order (PSPO) that criminalised prayer and support outside a London abortion clinic. Alina Dulgheriu, a mother supported by a pro-life vigil outside the clinic, had filed a High Court challenge to Ealing Council's PSPO in April 2018. The High Court accepted that her rights to freedom of expression, religion, and assembly had been infringed, but it upheld the PSPO. The Court of Appeal will now consider whether Ealing's PSPO is lawful.

Assisted dying

RCP seeks members' views

A new poll by the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) will seek members' views on whether the law should change to permit assisted dying. A 2014 survey found that most respondents did not support a change²: 44.4% said that the RCP should oppose assisted dying, 31.0% said that it should be neutral, and 24.6% said that it should be in favour. The RCP said that it will adopt a neutral position until two thirds of respondents say that it should favour or oppose a change in the law. Members will have two weeks to respond to the poll, which will be sent out in early February. Results will be released in March.

Public health

GMC ups capacity to test overseas doctors

The General Medical Council will open a new test centre for overseas doctors wishing to sit its Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board exams. Doctors from outside the European Economic Area must pass these exams before they can practise in the UK. The number taking the exams rose by over 75% from 2017 to 2018.³ The new centre in Manchester, which opens later this year, will allow the regulator to test 11 000 doctors a year, twice the number that it can currently accommodate.

Invest to halt drug resistant STIs, say directors

An extra £3.2bn (€3.61bn; \$4.12bn) a year in public health grants is needed if health systems are to stop the growth of drug resistant sexually transmitted infections, the Association of Directors of Public Health warned. It called for the extra funding after new cases of gonorrhoea with high level resistance to

azithromycin and ceftriaxone were confirmed in England. The association said that additional investment is the only way to maintain current levels of service and to tackle these new threats.

Government probes unhealthy food and drink promotions

The UK government launched a 12 week consultation on proposed rules to curb retail promotions thought to cause children's excessive consumption of food and drink high in fat, sugar, and salt.⁴ It asks for views on curtailing multi-buy promotions such as "buy one, get one free" and promotions at checkouts, entrances, and the end of aisles. Parveen Kumar, BMA board of science chair, said that such promotions undermine parents' attempts to make healthier choices for themselves and their children.

UK needs minister for hunger, say MPs

Nearly one in five (19%) UK children under 15 lives in a home where the parents cannot afford to put food on the table, and half of these children are severely food insecure, said the Environmental Audit Committee. The Food Foundation told the committee that this makes the UK "one of, if not the, worst performing nations in the European Union." The committee urged the government to appoint a minister for hunger to act on food insecurity. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.l126)

Research news

Eating fibre may cut heart disease risk

Convincing evidence shows that nutrition guidelines should focus on increasing dietary fibre and on replacing refined grains

with whole grains to improve health, said researchers. Results of studies commissioned by the World Health Organization, reported in the *Lancet*, showed a 15-31% decrease in all cause and cardiovascular mortality and in incidence of coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and colorectal cancer when comparing people who had the highest dietary fibre intake with the lowest consumers. And higher intakes of whole grains were associated with a 13-33% lower risk in all critical outcomes measured. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.l159)

Mesh complications raise depression risk

Women who need a surgical intervention for complications after a mid-urethral mesh sling procedure have a notably higher risk of new onset depression and self harm, a Canadian population based study found. "Women can be profoundly affected by complications from a mid-urethral mesh sling procedure, and even with surgical revision the symptoms of these complications may not be completely corrected," said the researchers, who published their findings in *JAMA Surgery*. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.l109)

- 1 House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts. Mental health services for children and young people. Seventy-second report of session 2017-19. Jan 2019. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmpubacc/1593/1593.pdf>.
- 2 Murphy E. Assisted dying: the Royal College of GPs and Royal College of Physicians have an opportunity to learn from mistakes of the past. *BMJ Opinion* 11 Sept 2018. <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2018/09/11/assisted-dying-the-royal-college-of-gps-and-royal-college-of-physicians-have-an-opportunity-to-learn-from-mistakes-of-the-past/>.
- 3 Rimmer A. More non-EU doctors are taking exams to work in UK, data show. *BMJ* 2018;363:k5409. 10.1136/bmj.k5409 30578292
- 4 Department of Health and Social Care. Restricting promotions of food linked to childhood obesity: public asked views. Jan 2019. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/restricting-promotions-of-food-linked-to-childhood-obesity-public-asked-views>.

Published by the BMJ Publishing Group Limited. For permission to use (where not already granted under a licence) please go to <http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions>