



NEWS

Seven days in medicine: 14-20 August 2019

Drug deaths

England and Wales report all time high

Some 4359 deaths were related to drug poisoning in England and Wales in 2018, the highest number and biggest annual increase (16%) since the time series began in 1993, figures from the Office for National Statistics showed.¹ Two thirds (2917) of the deaths were related to drug misuse, and 51% involved an opiate. Deaths involving cocaine during 2015-18 doubled to their highest ever level of 637, up from 320. The north east had a considerably higher death rate than all other English regions, and London had the lowest.

Scotland

Doctors call for £3bn extra funding a year

Doctors' leaders in Scotland warned of an "ongoing decline" in hospital services unless years of underfunding are halted. A report produced by BMA Scotland set out 20 proposals for reform,² including extra funding of around £3bn (£3.28bn; \$3.64bn) a year to increase health spending to 10% of GDP, in line with comparator countries in the EU. The leaders also want a "more mature" approach to targets, better workforce planning, greater investment in staff health, and responsibility given to frontline consultants to run services.

Bogus psychiatrist's records are reviewed

Health boards in Scotland are reviewing the treatment records of a bogus psychiatrist who practised in the NHS for 23 years without any medical qualifications, and they plan to write to her former patients. Zholia Alemi is serving a five year prison sentence for forging a widowed patient's will in an attempt to inherit her £1.3m (£1.4m; \$1.6m) estate.³ Alemi dropped out of the University of Auckland in New Zealand after failing the first year of a five year medical degree, but she was allowed to join the UK medical register after presenting faked documents. She worked for five health boards: Ayrshire and Arran, Tayside, Highland, Borders, and Greater Glasgow and Clyde.

Brexit

BMA criticises plan for no-deal freight service

David Wrigley, BMA deputy chair, described as "beyond alarming" the government's plans to set up a £25m (£27.3m; \$30.4m) "express freight service," for which a supplier is yet to be appointed, to deliver medicines in a no-deal Brexit. He said that it was an "indication of the chaos that will lie in store for the NHS and patients," adding, "The inability to supply critical medication will place patients' lives at risk."

Digital GP

App service Livi expands to cover 1.85 million patients in England

The digital GP service provider Livi will now cover 1.85 million patients in Birmingham, Northamptonshire, Shropshire, and Surrey, after agreeing new partnerships with local GP federations. The Swedish private company launched its video consultations app in the UK last October at 40 NHS general practices in the North West Surrey clinical commissioning group area, covering 360 000 patients. Under the contract GPs can direct patients to the Livi app for medical advice if they consider it appropriate, with virtual appointments available during core hours, evenings, weekends, and bank holidays. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.l5118)

NICE

Treat impetigo with antiseptics, not antibiotics

Clinicians should treat non-bullous impetigo with a topical antiseptic rather than antibiotics, says new draft guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Its review with Public Health England found that a topical antiseptic, such as hydrogen peroxide 1% cream, was just as effective as a topical antibiotic. In some situations antibiotics will still be suitable, such as if a person has widespread non-bullous impetigo, the guidelines say. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.l5162)

Drug pricing

Company may pay NHS £8m in drug price investigation

The drug company Aspen may have to pay the NHS £8m (£8.8m; \$9.7m) after the Competition and Markets Authority investigated an arrangement it made with two rival companies, which left it as the sole supplier of fludrocortisone acetate (100 microgram tablets), used to treat Addison's disease. As a result of the ongoing investigation Aspen approached the Competition and Markets Authority and offered to resolve the issue with certain actions, including a payment of £8m to be divided among England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. This offer is still pending final approval. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.l5152)

Cystic fibrosis drugs are rejected for NHS use in Scotland

Expensive drugs for cystic fibrosis were rejected for NHS use in Scotland, but discussions continued with the manufacturer. The Scottish Medicines Consortium, which advises NHS Scotland on new drugs, said that "significant uncertainty"

remained about the overall health benefits of Orkambi (lumacaftor and ivacaftor) and Symkevi (tezacaftor and ivacaftor) in relation to their costs. The decision mirrors that taken in England by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, to the dismay and anger of families affected by cystic fibrosis.

Research news

Social media can harm by displacing sleep or exercise

Much of the harm attributed to social media use in young people is “unlikely to be directly related to social media use,” researchers from London found, depending instead on whether it displaces sleep and exercise or involves cyberbullying, especially in girls. This finding, reported in *Lancet Child and Adolescent Health*, suggested that improving the mental health of young people should focus on preventing cyberbullying and ensuring that they have enough sleep and physical activity. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.l5143)

Diabetes care has not improved US outcomes

From 2013 to 2016 just 23% of 1742 adults with diagnosed diabetes achieved targets set out in the 2018 American Diabetes Association guidelines (including controlled blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol) as well as not smoking tobacco, a study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* found. Results were similar in 2005-08 and 2009-12. Deborah Wexler, study author from Harvard Medical School, said, “Barriers [to] accessing healthcare, including lack of health insurance and high drug costs, remain major factors that have not been adequately addressed on a population level.” (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.l5166)

Intravenous feeds

NHS declares national emergency over shortage

The NHS declared a national emergency incident “at the highest level” in response to an ongoing shortage of intravenous feed supplies that has affected hundreds of patients in England. Aidan Fowler, NHS national patient safety director, said that the service was considering importing products to ensure sufficient supplies in response to shortages, which arose when the manufacturer Calea was ordered by the Medicines and

Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency to change its manufacturing process for parenteral nutrition bags after safety concerns. The reduction in Calea’s output is set to last longer than had been anticipated.

Patient registration

Patient who shared practice’s CQC rating on Facebook is told to go elsewhere

Culcheth Medical Centre in Warrington, England, was criticised for writing to a patient advising her to register elsewhere after she posted a link to a story from the *Warrington Guardian* about the practice having received a “requires improvement” rating from the Care Quality Commission after an inspection in May. In a letter to the unnamed patient the practice manager, Shelley Moores, said that the patient might wish to register with another practice because of the breakdown in the patient-doctor relationship. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.l5164)

Cannabis

Consumption in Canada changes little after legalisation

Statistics Canada’s latest national cannabis survey⁴ suggested that, in 2019, essentially the same number of Canadians report having used cannabis in the previous three months (about 4.9 million; 16% of Canadians aged 15 and older) as in 2018, before legalisation. The Cannabis Act (C-45) became law in Canada on 17 October 2018. The number of Canadians over 65 reporting cannabis use in the second quarter of the year increased from 3% in 2018 to 5% in 2019. Use among 15-64 year olds was stable. More Canadian males use cannabis than females (21% v 12%), and males were twice as likely to report daily or almost daily use (8% v 4%).

- 1 Office for National Statistics. Deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales: 2018 registrations. 15 Aug 2019. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsrelatedtodrugpoisoninginenglandandwales/2018registrations>.
- 2 BMA Scotland. Secondary care matters: shaping the future of safe, sustainable hospital-based healthcare in Scotland. Aug 2019. <https://www.bma.org.uk/-/media/files/pdfs/bma-scotland-secondary-care-matters-aug-2019.pdf?la=en>.
- 3 Dyer C. GMC checks 3000 doctors’ credentials after fraudulent psychiatrist practised for 23 years. *BMJ* 2018;363:k4909. 10.1136/bmj.k4909 30459260
- 4 Statistics Canada. National cannabis survey, second quarter 2019. *Daily* 2019 Aug 15. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/190815/dq190815a-eng.htm>.

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