



Seven days in medicine: 26 Feb to 3 Mar 2020

Emergency medicine

Royal college launches campaign to end “corridor care”

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine began a campaign to improve UK emergency departments, as data showed that over 100 000 patients had waited for over 12 hours in emergency departments since the start of winter. Katherine Henderson, the college’s president, said, “We must not forget the real human stories behind these numbers. Many of these patients may have received life changing news while stuck on a trolley in a rundown corridor. This is morally wrong.” The campaign calls for performance standards to be a hospital-wide priority and not just a problem for emergency departments.

Drug deaths

Summit ends with no agreement

Two days of talks in Glasgow demonstrated that UK politicians were as far apart as ever in developing a shared approach to tackling record numbers of drug related deaths. Activists campaigning for better services for drug users expressed anger that a UK summit had ended with no action—only promises of further talks. Drug related deaths are at an all time high in Britain: in 2018 some 2917 deaths were recorded in England and Wales and 1187 in Scotland. The Scottish death rate from drugs is now the highest in Europe and on a par with the US.

Patient data

People want to know how their data are used

The UK public supports third parties using NHS health data only when this benefits patients, such as by improving disease detection or developing new treatments, rather than bringing financial gain for the NHS, showed a survey of over 2000 people.¹ Most respondents (74%) wanted the public to be involved in decisions on how health data were used. Understanding Patient Data, a group set up in 2016 to promote understanding of the uses of health and care data, conducted the survey and called for a national strategy for governance of NHS data.

Egg freezing

Law is too restrictive, say medical organisations

The 10 year time limit on storing frozen eggs for non-medical reasons should be extended to give women more choice throughout their reproductive years, said the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the British Fertility Society. They said that the existing limit could discourage

women from freezing eggs in their 20s, delaying this until their 30s when the quality of eggs is reduced and the chances of success may be lower. Eggs can now be stored indefinitely, and the current time limit “has no biological or medical basis,” said a scientific impact paper published by the college.²

Gambling

Regulator “should do more” to identify problem areas

The UK Gambling Commission is unlikely to be fully effective in tackling the risks and harms of gambling to consumers under its current arrangements, the National Audit Office (NAO) concluded.³ The commission is a small outfit in a challenging and dynamic industry worth £11.3bn (€13bn; \$14.4bn) in profits, but it is constrained by inflexible funding of just £19m and a lack of evidence on how industry developments affect consumers, the NAO found. It also needs to do more to identify where problems are occurring and ensure that gambling operators raise their standards, the report said.

Mental health

Local rehabilitation services are lacking

A lack of national standards for rehabilitation of people with severe mental health conditions such as psychosis is hindering service delivery, as well as no agreed definition of appropriate out-of-area treatment, said the charity Rethink Mental Illness and the Royal College of Psychiatrists. They found that 1744 patients in England were currently staying in rehabilitation centres away from their local area and that 333 rehabilitation care beds had been decommissioned in the past five years. Out-of-area beds should be the exception rather than the norm, they said, as in acute mental health. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.m801)

Overseas news

Germany repeals ban on assist dying services

Germany’s highest court ruled that a 2015 law banning assisted suicide provision breached the constitution. “The prohibition of assisted suicide services . . . violates the basic law and is void,” the constitutional court in Karlsruhe said in its ruling. Lawmakers must now draw up new legislation to reflect the decision.

US upholds “gag rule” that stops doctors recommending abortion providers

A US federal appeal court upheld a Trump administration rule that forbids doctors who provide federally funded reproductive

health services from recommending abortion providers or referring patients to them. The ruling affects clinics that accept Title X (“Title 10”) funding, named after a federal programme that provides about \$280m (£219m; €252m) in reproductive health services each year, mostly to women on low incomes. Title X clinics have never been permitted to provide abortions, but since 2000 their doctors have been allowed to give a neutral presentation on the subject and to make referrals to abortion clinics that do not receive Title X money. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.m762)

Research news

Targeted GP screening detects lung cancer in 2% of high risk patients

Screening high risk current or former smokers identified at annual COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) reviews as part of routine primary care in England led to 2% having lung cancer diagnosed, mostly at an early stage that could be treated with curative intent, a study showed. “We report a novel NHS commissioned service targeting individuals attending annual COPD review,” explained the study authors, led by Helen Grover of South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust. “We have demonstrated that this can be established within routine NHS clinical practice.” Results were published in the journal *Thorax*. (Full story doi:10.1136/bmj.m823)

MPs with extra roles are more likely to be risky drinkers

Members of the UK parliament need to be better informed about their own wellbeing service, researchers concluded, after finding that many drank at risky levels, especially if they had additional work roles. A survey of 46 MPs (response rate 22.5%), published in *BMJ Open*,⁴ found that MPs were more likely than the general population to drink at least four times a week, to drink at least 10 units on a typical drinking day, to drink six or more units in any one session, and to say that they felt guilty about their drinking. MPs with additional roles outside parliament were nearly three times as likely to be risky drinkers.

Representation

NHS launches taskforce to improve diversity on boards

The NHS Confederation launched an independent unit to help NHS organisations increase diversity on their non-executive boards and governing bodies. The team will be chaired by the GP leader Clare Gerada, who is now co-chair of the NHS Assembly, and Joan Saddler, director of partnerships and equality at the NHS Confederation. The confederation said that a more diverse workforce had been shown to improve productivity, problem solving, and job satisfaction. It argued that a diverse workforce was as crucial at board level as in frontline healthcare.

Medical cannabis

Rules on imports are relaxed to speed up access

The government announced that companies would be able to import cannabis based products for medicinal use in advance into the UK and would be able to hold supplies that can be given to patients with prescriptions through a pharmacy. The change should mean that patients are not waiting for months for their prescriptions to be filled. The government said that it would continue to engage with medical associations and patients on building an evidence base by using UK trials to accelerate understanding of how medicinal cannabis can benefit patients, for wider prescribing by NHS clinicians in the future.

- 1 Understanding Patient Data. Accountability, transparency and public participation must be established for third-party use of NHS data. 2 Mar 2020. <https://understandingpatientdata.org.uk/news/accountability-transparency-and-public-participation-must-be-established-third-party-use-nhs>.
- 2 Anderson RA, Davies MC, Lavery SA, on behalf of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. Elective egg freezing for non-medical reasons. scientific impact paper no 63. *BJOG* 2020. 10.1111/1471-0528.16025. <https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/sip63>.
- 3 National Audit Office. Gambling regulation: problem gambling and protecting vulnerable people. 28 Feb 2020. https://www.nao.org.uk/report/gambling-regulation-problem-gambling-and-protecting-the-vulnerable/?utm_content=&utm_medium=email&utm_name=&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=.
- 4 Rao R, Bakolis I, Das-Munsh J, et al. Alcohol consumption of UK members of parliament: cross-sectional survey. *BMJ Open* 2020. 10.1136/bmjopen-2019-034929.

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>