In brief

Prescribing rises year on year in England: Nearly 927 million prescribed items were dispensed in England in 2010, a 5% rise on 2009 and a 68% rise on 2000, says a report from the NHS Information Centre. The average number of prescribed items per person was 17.8 last year, up from 17.1 in 2009 and 11.2 in 2000. In 2010 two thirds of items were dispensed in generic form, up from 38% in 2000. Drugs for cardiovascular illness were the most commonly prescribed items. (See www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/primary-care/prescriptions.)

Inquiry to examine asthma deaths: The Royal College of Physicians, together with professional and patients’ groups concerned with asthma, is launching a confidential inquiry into why 1200 UK people die from asthma each year, when 90% of cases are thought to be preventable. It will be reviewing all deaths from asthma over the 12 months from February 2012. The research has been commissioned by the Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership, which is led by a consortium of medical royal colleges.

Cost of drugs too high for US elderly people: Up to one in 10 elderly people registered with Medicare don’t take their prescribed drug or skip doses to make it last longer, because it’s too expensive, irrespective of whether they have cancer, finds a study in the Journal of Cancer Survivorship (doi:10.1007/s11764-011-0188-4). Other cost saving measures included cutting back on food and heat so as to be able to buy drugs, opting for generic rather than brand drugs, and requesting free samples.

Poland may ban all abortions: Progressive Catholic organisations from around the world have written to the Polish parliament urging it to ensure that abortion remains available to women in Poland. A bill due to be debated in September would outlaw abortion even in cases where a woman’s health is in danger. The letter emphasises widespread Catholic support for a woman’s right to reproductive health services, including abortion.

Climate change is responsible for 300 000 deaths a year: The 2010 climate vulnerability report by DARA (Development Assistance Research Associates), a think tank committed to improving aid in disasters, found that climate change threatens achievement of the United Nations’ millennium development goals in more than 50 poor countries because it aggravates hunger and child mortality. DARA reviewed more than 50 measures for dealing with climate change effects, including targeting desertification, tackling malnutrition, and use of insecticide treated antimalaria nets, and found that cost effective measures exist for dealing with every major climate stress.

Cite this as: BMJ 2011;343:d4976