Seven days in medicine: 18-24 May

UK news

Agreement is reached on junior doctors’ contract

Junior doctors in England will vote from 17 June to 1 July on whether to accept the latest contract on their terms and conditions, and the result will be made known on 6 July. The BMA and the government agreed the details of the new contract on 18 May after 10 days of talks (full story doi:1136/bmj.i2853). For more coverage on the junior doctor contract in BMJ Careers see http://bit.ly/25ji3hP and http://bit.ly/20FiTvH.

Incentivising GPs does not affect mortality

The NHS Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF)—the world’s largest pay-for-performance programme in primary care—has not improved mortality rates from the chronic conditions targeted by the programme, including cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, the results of a study published in the Lancet showed (full story doi:10.1136/bmj.i2882).

Academics warn of “Brexit” threat to NHS

A group of leading academics, writing in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, argued that the NHS would get less money if the United Kingdom left the European Union, as the Treasury estimates that tax receipts could be lower by £36bn (£47.3bn; $52.9bn) a year. Around 50 000 people work for the NHS, including 9000 doctors, and their continued employment “would be uncertain, as would be the future recruitment of workers from Europe.”

Tobacco companies fail to stop plain packaging

Plain packaging of tobacco products in the United Kingdom came into force on Friday 20 May, the day after a judge in the High Court dismissed a legal challenge by the world’s four biggest tobacco manufacturers. Mr Justice Green said in his ruling, “The essence of the case is about whether it is lawful for states to prevent the tobacco industry from continuing to make profits by using their trade marks and other rights to further what the World Health Organization describes as a health crisis of epidemic proportions and which imposes an immense clean-up cost on the public purse. In my judgment the regulations are valid and lawful in all respects.”

Zika virus

Zika risk in Europe

The overall risk of Zika virus transmission in Europe this spring and summer is low to moderate, the World Health Organization said. But it warned that Georgia, Madeira, and the southern part of the Russian Federation were at high risk of the disease. A moderate risk of spread was found in 18 countries, primarily in the Mediterranean basin, including France, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Turkey (full story doi:10.1136/bmj.i2887).

WHO quells call to cancel Olympics

Calls to cancel this summer’s Olympic Games in Brazil for fear of accelerating a global spread of the Zika virus were quelled by new World Health Organization guidance. Amir Attaran, of the University of Ottawa in Canada, described Rio de Janeiro as being at the “heart” of the current Zika epidemic and said that the Olympic organisers must postpone or move the games. But WHO’s guidance advised athletes and visitors to practise safe sex, choose air conditioned accommodation, use insect repellent, and wear light coloured clothing covering the body (full story doi:10.1136/bmj.i2899).

Research news

Bariatric surgery for type 2 diabetes

Bariatric surgery should be included in guidelines for people with type 2 diabetes and obesity, diabetes societies recommended in a joint statement, for the first time recognising surgery as a therapeutic intervention for such patients. The societies agreed that surgery should be recommended to treat type 2 diabetes in all patients with a body mass index (BMI) above 40.0 and in those with BMI 35.0-39.9 where hyperglycaemia is inadequately controlled, and it should be considered for patients with BMI 30.0-34.9 where hyperglycaemia is not controlled despite optimal treatment (full story doi:10.1136/bmj.i2955).

Childhood environment link to cancer risk

A rapid review provided more evidence of a link between children’s surroundings and their risk of cancer later in life. People brought up in the poorest households had a greater risk of stomach and lung cancer in later life, and some evidence showed an increased risk of colorectal, liver, cervical, and pancreatic cancers in people with a lower childhood socioeconomic position (full story doi:10.1136/bmj.i2808).

Aspirin after stroke reduces further events

Taking aspirin cuts the risk of recurrent ischaemic stroke by nearly 60% in the six weeks after a transient ischaemic attack (TIA) or ischaemic stroke, but the benefit then declines to no effect by 12 weeks, a study in the Lancet found. “Medical services should give aspirin as soon as possible [after suspected TIA or stroke] and public education should be aimed at self administration after unfamiliar transient neurological symptoms...
suggestive of threatened stroke,” said the researchers (full story doi:10.1136/bmj.i2876).

Antibiotics

Drug companies “should get $1bn” for new antibiotics

Drug manufacturers should get rewards of more than $1bn (£680m; €894m) for each new antibiotic they bring to the market, said the final report of a review on antimicrobial resistance. It said that some $40bn should be spent in the next decade to fight antimicrobial resistance and proposed a levy on the drug industry, which could be avoided by companies that invest in research to tackle antimicrobial resistance (full story doi:10.1136/bmj.i2863).