



## New cases of asthma in children in England and Wales has fallen by two thirds

Andrew Cole

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the German Cigarette Industry Association, said that the criticised additives had been legally permitted since 1964.

Annette Tuffs *Heidelberg*

The German Cancer Research Centre's publications are available (in German) at [www.tabakkontrolle.de/](http://www.tabakkontrolle.de/)

## Researcher to be sacked after reporting high rates of ADHD

A US researcher who said that doctors and psychologists may be overdiagnosing attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children has been placed on administrative leave "with intent to terminate" her employment. The move came after charges of scientific misconduct against her, and her computers have been seized.

Dr Gretchen LeFever, a clinical psychologist and associate professor in the department of paediatrics at the East Virginia Medical School, was notified that the school intends to terminate her employment with effect from the end of March.

Her work has been controversial. She first made headline news in 1999 when she reported that 8% to 10% of elementary school pupils in southeastern Virginia were being prescribed drugs for ADHD, a percentage two to three times the estimated national average (*American Journal of Public Health* 1999; 89:1359-64). Criticism grew after she published the results of a 2002 study showing that the prevalence of the disorder among children in grades 2 to 5 had risen to 17% (*Psychology in the Schools* 2002;39:63-71).

In December Gerald Pepe, interim dean of the medical school, wrote to Dr LeFever charging her with "jeopardising the rights of children" and deviating from a research protocol.

Dr LeFever denies the charges and said she believes she is being sacked for reasons relating to her concern about widespread use of drugs.

Officials at the medical school would only confirm that Dr LeFever is on administrative

leave but did not respond to other questions about her pending dismissal.

Jeanne Lenzer *New York*

## Private providers must be stopped from skimming off easy cases

The UK government needs to act urgently to stop private providers of NHS services skimming off the less difficult cases, MPs warned this week.

The House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, in a report of its inquiry into choice in public services, said government plans to bring private companies to heel were so far "sketchy and inadequate."

The concerns are about reforms due in December 2005 (although schemes are already in place on a smaller scale), when all patients will be given a choice of hospital for elective treatment. The choice may include non-NHS facilities. Under the new funding system for acute hospital trusts, called payment by results, the NHS loses money if patients opt to go elsewhere.

But the report warned that choice was not the most important thing for the public, especially if it leads to the closure of hospitals. It urged the government to do more to prevent the private sector gaining an unfair advantage.

Rebecca Coombes *London*

*Choice, Voice and Public Services* is available from the committees section of [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk)

## Doctors publish details of multiresistant HIV patient

Researchers have published clinical and sequencing details of a unique variant of HIV in a patient who is resistant to several classes of antiretroviral drugs and who rapidly developed AIDS, after media reports of a possible new "super-strain" of the virus (*Lancet* 2005;365:1031-8).

The patient, a man in his 40s from New York, was given a diagnosis of HIV-1 infection in December 2004 after he had had fever, pharyngitis, weakness, and fatigue the previous month. Earlier he had tested negative for HIV-1 antibodies on several occasions between September 2000 and May 2003. His illness progressed to AIDS within 20 months—and perhaps as little as four months—of infection. The case was first publicised at a press conference in New York last month and then discussed at the 12th retroviral conference in Boston (*BMJ* 2005;330:498, 5 Mar).

Detailed analysis of the virus showed that it was resistant to three of the four major classes of antiretroviral drugs: nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors, non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors, and protease inhibitors. Viruses usually become less virulent when they acquire drug resistance. However, the replication capacity of the patient's HIV-1 was 136% in comparison with a median of 100% derived from a large number of wild type viruses. This indicated that despite its multi-drug resistance the virus replicated as well as most wild type, drug susceptible viruses.

Susan Mayor *London*

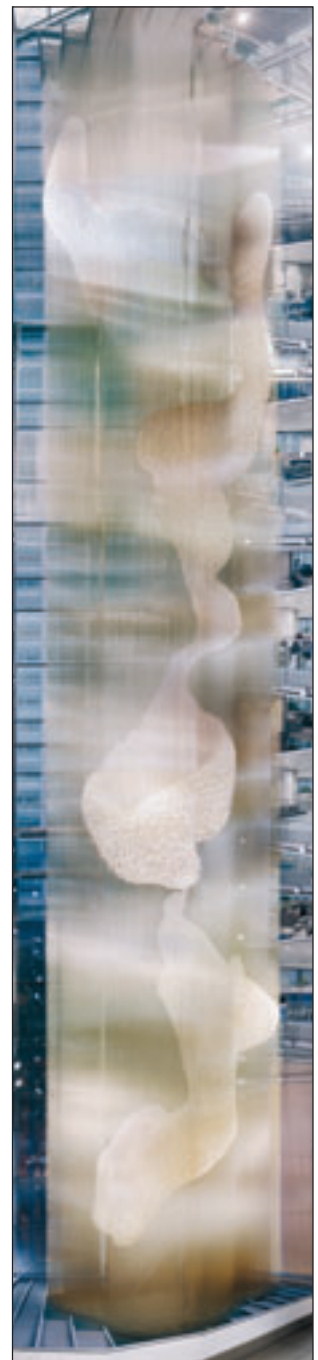
## New cases of asthma in children fall by two thirds

The number of new cases of asthma fell significantly in England and Wales between 1996 and 2003, with the number in children falling the most, the latest issue of *Social Trends* says.

Between 1996 and 2003 new episodes of asthma (the mean weekly incidence of a first or new attack) fell by 46% among men and boys and by 41% among women and girls. The biggest decline was among children aged under 5 years—a fall of nearly two thirds. New episodes halved among the 5 to 24 years age group. The issue does not indicate any possible reasons for this.

Andrew Cole *London*

The latest issue of *Social Trends* is at [www.statistics.gov.uk/socialtrends35](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/socialtrends35)



## Medical research charity unveils glass sculpture

A 30 m high sculpture, consisting of 150 000 glass spheres and a million metres of fine steel wire, by the Thomas Heatherwick Studio, has been installed in the new headquarters of the Wellcome Trust, one of the world's largest medical research charities, in Euston Road, London.

Annabel Ferriman *BMJ*