

In brief

Half of British workers worry about workplace smoking: More than 12 million UK workers are concerned about the risks of developing lung cancer from passive smoking at work, estimates a MORI survey published this week. It also says that over a quarter are "very concerned."

Vaccine campaign reduces illness in hajj travellers: A meningitis vaccination campaign, launched in 2001 to offer immunisation to the 50 000 UK Muslims who travel on the annual hajj pilgrimage to Mecca each year, has dramatically cut the cases of a strain of meningitis. Identified cases of meningococcal infection from the W135 strain in UK residents fell from 45 cases in 2000 and 38 cases in 2001 to just six cases after the campaign in 2002. See www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/hajj.htm

Pertussis outbreak in Afghanistan: WHO has reported 115 cases and 17 deaths from pertussis in the district of Khwahan, in Afghanistan's northeastern province of Badakhshan. A team consisting of health workers from the Afghan Ministry of Health, WHO, and the Aga Khan Development Network has been flown to the area. A United Nations helicopter will follow later with supplies of erythromycin and vaccines.

Antipsychotic drug helps to cut suicide rate: Clozapine has been found to reduce the risk of suicide in people with schizophrenia. Results from the international suicide prevention trial study, published this week (*Archives of General Psychiatry* 2003;60:82-91), show that suicidal behaviour was reduced in patients treated with clozapine, compared with patients treated with olanzapine (hazard ratio 0.76 (95% confidence interval 0.58 to 0.97)). Patients treated with clozapine were less likely to attempt suicide (34 patients *v* 55; $P=0.03$), need hospitalisation (82 *v* 107; $P=0.05$), or need rescue intervention to prevent suicide (118 *v* 155; $P=0.01$). The study was funded by Novartis.

Company launches campaign to "counter" *BMJ* claims

Ray Moynihan *Washington, DC*

A public relations company with clients in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology industry has launched a global campaign to "counter" a recent *BMJ* article on "female sexual dysfunction" that detailed drug company sponsorship of medical meetings where the condition was defined (4 January, p 45).

London based HCC De Facto this week sent email messages to women's health groups in Canada and Australia seeking volunteers to speak to the press and help generate media coverage to counter the journal article.

HCC De Facto, which describes its brief as "full service PR and communications," is currently working on recruitment and publicity for an unnamed pharmaceutical company running phase III trials of a "PDE5 inhibitor" for "female sexual dys-

function." Pfizer, Bayer, and Lilly-ICOS all make these Viagra type drugs, but it is not known which company—if any of these three—is working with HCC De Facto.

In an email message about the phase III trials sent to patients' groups this week, HCC De Facto's senior account manager, Michelle Lerner, said the *BMJ* article had questioned whether the condition in fact exists. Her message said, "I know many support organisations have been incensed about these claims, and we think it's important to counter them and get another voice on the record. I was wondering whether you or someone from your organisation may be willing to work with us to generate articles ... countering the point of view raised in the *BMJ*. This would involve speaking with select reporters about

FSD [female sexual dysfunction], its causes and treatments."

Contacted by the *BMJ*, Ms Lerner initially denied being involved in anything to "counter" the article but later conceded that she had sent a confidential message to four patient support groups in Canada and Australia, where a phase III trial has just started. Lerner declined repeated requests to identify the manufacturer of the "PDE5 inhibitor" being trialled, stating that it would "violate ethical guidelines."

Mr Bob Burton, an author and journalist specialising in the public relations industry, said, "Clumsy efforts like this are based on what PR practitioners refer to as the 'third party principle.' It is all about seeking to invisibly orchestrate patient groups and community groups—who are seen as many times more credible than sponsoring companies—to parrot the claims of the PR companies' clients." □

Competing interest: Ray Moynihan also wrote the *BMJ* article published on 4 January.

Environmentalist accused of scientific dishonesty

Caroline White *London*

A leading international environmentalist, Professor Bjørn Lomborg, has been found guilty of scientific dishonesty by the Danish government committees that investigate scientific fraud and misconduct.

But the ruling has sparked a furore, with questions raised about the basis on which the decision has been reached, and has forced the Danish Research Agency to issue a disclaimer about its intentions.

This week the Danish parliament will debate whether the country's national Environmental Assessment Institute, of which Professor Lomborg was appointed director last February, should also be investigated.

Professor Lomborg, who is an associate professor of statistics in the Department of Political Science at Denmark's University of Aarhus, provoked



Professor Bjørn Lomborg

Three complaints were brought against Professor Lomborg last spring, followed by a further complaint in November, all of which hinged on the scientific validity of *The Skeptical Environmentalist*.

The accusations ranged across data fabrication, distortion, plagiarism, and deliberate misrepresentation of others' results. Evidence was also taken from critiques of the book by four leading experts, published in *Scientific American* in January last year.

The Danish Committees on Scientific Dishonesty of the Danish Research Agency began its deliberations in June, and took the view that "based on customary scientific standards and in light of his systematic onesidedness in the choice of data and line of argument, [Professor Lomborg] has clearly acted at variance with good scientific practice."

They concluded that *The Skeptical Environmentalist* was intended to be evaluated as science, and as such, the scientific message had been sufficiently perverted to warrant the author guilty of scientific dishonesty, although not guilty of deliberate intention to mislead or of gross negligence. □