

Disciplinary shake-up close

BY LISA PRITCHARD

NEW DISCIPLINARY procedures for doctors, due to be revealed soon, could be a model for the rest of the NHS, doctors leaders have said.

The speedy conclusion of talks in England between the BMA and the Department of Health was one of this week's key recommendations from MPs who examined the impact of NHS suspensions.

BMA central consultants and specialists committee joint deputy chairman Jonathan Fielden said the talks were 'very close' to a conclusion. He said the process, coupled with joint BMA/DoH best practice guidance on exclusions

published in December 2003 — which insists cases should be resolved within six months — could provide a 'cutting edge' model for other clinical staff.

The Commons public accounts select committee said this week that the suspension of clinical staff was still costing the NHS £40m a year, which was 'much too high'. Committee chairman Edward Leigh said the DoH and the NHS as a whole 'need to get a much better grip on the management of all exclusions of clinical staff and resolve cases within at least the existing six-month target'.

Between April 2001 and July 2002 more than 1,000 clinical staff at NHS hospital and ambulance



FIELDEN: 'NHS must get a grip of prolonged suspensions'

Clinical Staff in NHS Hospitals and Ambulance Trusts in England suggests that because much of the DoH's guidance on suspensions for doctors is generic, highlighting good management practice, it could be used to cover other clinical staff.

It also calls for the National Clinical Assessment Authority's remit to be extended to cover NHS clinical staff other than doctors. Dr Fielden said any extension of this role would need to be properly resourced.

He added: 'We are glad that the committee has again highlighted the unnecessary and prolonged suspension of clinical staff as an area that the NHS must get a grip of.'

trusts in England were excluded from work for more than a month.

The average length of exclusion from work for suspended doctors was 47 weeks and 19 weeks for other clinical staff. In 30 cases exclusions lasted over two years.

The committee's report *The Management of Suspensions of*

Do not waver on smoke ban, BMA tells Executive

MINISTERS HAVE been urged to stand firm and introduce a smoking ban in Scotland.

BMA Scottish council chairman Peter Terry praised Scottish Executive plans for an outright ban on smoking in enclosed public places.

The Scottish Licensed Trade Association warned it was seeking legal advice with a view to challenging the ban. But Dr Terry said first minister Jack McConnell should stand firm. 'We applaud the first minister's courage and urge him not to be deflected or diverted from this path.'

Under the Executive's proposals, legislation to ban smoking

in enclosed public places would be introduced before Christmas, to come into force by Spring 2006. From this time:

- Licensees or employers who fail to enforce the law will be fined up to £2,500 with licensees facing the ultimate sanction of losing their liquor licence
- The legislation will be enforced by environmental health and local licensing officers
- Fixed penalty notices for smokers who do not comply with the law will be considered. Persistent offenders could be fined up to £1,000.



ALL ABOARD: an international crew of doctors and other healthcare workers boarded a red London double-decker bus to help raise money for global charity Mercy Ships. They took their place in the parade at last week's Lord Mayor's Show, in London, to highlight plans to help more than one million people in developing countries every year. The charity has two operational hospital ships, which sail to some of the poorest nations in the world. A third ship, the *Africa Mercy*, is being converted in Newcastle upon Tyne. Pictured on board the bus is retired London professor of surgery Ian McColl. In front, from left, are Basingstoke consultant anaesthetist Keith Thomson, Moscow obstetrician and gynaecologist Svetlana Nossarev, recently qualified German doctor Sia Kpakiwa, Hull anaesthetist Alex Bjorska and Basingstoke maxillofacial surgeon Cyrus Kerawala.
www.mercyships.org

Crisis and travel at careers fair

DEALING WITH career crises and working abroad will be among the topics at the fifth *BMJ Careers Medical Careers Fair*.

More than 2,500 doctors at every stage of their career are expected to attend the event, at the Business Design Centre, in Islington, London, on November 26 and 27.

One-to-one career advisory sessions with experts are being offered for the first time, and nearly 40 seminars and workshops will be held during the two days.

The event is free if you pre-register before midnight on November 23, at www.bmjcareers-fair.com. There is an entry charge of £20 if you turn up on the day.

Call for NHS to help doctors strike work-life balance

BETTER WORKPLACE facilities would help doctors maintain a healthier work-life balance, a public health expert has said.

Faculty of Public Health of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the UK past president Sian Griffiths told last week's Medical Women's Federation autumn meeting that there was a lack of balance in doctors' lives in terms

of health, diet and exercise.

She called on the NHS to lead the way in initiatives to promote healthy diet and exercise and asked: 'If the NHS does not set the example, why would we expect anyone else to do any of this?'

Professor Griffiths suggested a range of ways in which hospitals could be healthier working environments, including:

- Encouraging bicycle use by offering mileage allowances for bicycles and providing cycle racks and showers
 - Ensuring stairwells are easy to find and pleasant to use as an alternative to taking the lift
 - Providing a smoke-free environment and cessation services
 - Offering a choice of healthy foods in staff canteens
 - Scheduling exercise breaks in the working day.
- London emeritus professor of health and social policy Isobel Allen suggested it would be better for women doctors if the quality of doctors' contribution to the NHS could be measured using factors other than long hours, sitting on lots of committees and producing academic papers.

Book of the year

A Practical Manual of Diabetic Footcare has been named BMA Medical Book of the Year. Authors London consultant physician Michael Edmonds and podiatrists Alethea Foster, of London, and Lee Sanders, of Pennsylvania, also won in the endocrinology section of the BMA Medical Book Competition 2004. *The Guardian's* social affairs editor John Carvel was named BMA Medical Journalist of the Year. BMA council chairman James Johnson awarded 29 first prizes and 113 highly commended prizes last week.

Strategy revealed

Education and quality within primary care will be championed by the Royal College of GPs, its new chairman has pledged. Mayur Lakhani announced his leadership strategy for the next three years at the RCGP annual general meeting in London last week. He wants to see higher standards for GP training to help family doctors with their obligations to the new contract and to prepare for appraisal and revalidation.

Negligence plan

Clinical negligence insurance should be a condition of registration for all doctors, the Medical Defence Union has said in response to a Department of Health consultation. The MDU backed DoH proposals to make insurance mandatory for dentists and went on to say it would be 'very simple' and effective to make indemnity insurance compulsory for all healthcare professionals.

Tickell talk tickets

Former UK permanent representative to the United Nations Sir Crispin Tickell is guest speaker at the BMA Oxford Division's annual dinner on November 24. Tickets are available for his talk, *Prospects for Global Change and its Impact on Health*. The event starts at 7pm at Kellogg College, Oxford. Email lbishop@bma.org.uk or sfell@bma.org.uk

**HAVE YOUR SAY...
BMA CONFERENCE ON
THE NHS IMPROVEMENT
PLAN LIVE WEB CAST**

A live webcast will allow doctors to join the BMA conference on the NHS Improvement Plan. Speakers at the November 30 conference at BMA House, London, include University College London professor of health policy Allyson Pollock and NHS Confederation policy director Nigel Edwards. BMA members can log in to www.bma.org.uk for full details of the day's events and information on how to take part.