

MEDICINE

Smoking

“Overdue” ban of menthol cigarettes is welcomed

The charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) welcomed the “long overdue” ban on “child friendly” menthol cigarettes in England, which came into force on 20 May. All other characterising flavours in cigarettes were banned in May 2017, but the date for banning menthol was delayed by three years after lobbying from the tobacco industry. Despite a long term decline in smoking among children in England, ASH noted that an estimated 280 children aged under 16 started smoking each day, highlighting why the menthol ban was needed.

Immigration

NHS fee is scrapped for overseas health workers

Doctors welcomed the decision to scrap the immigration health surcharge for healthcare workers. The charge requires people from outside the EU to pay £400 per person each year to use the NHS. After pressure from medical groups and the Labour Party the government said on 21 May it would remove the charge for NHS and social care workers “as soon as possible.” Chaand Nagpaul, BMA council chair, described the move as a moral victory that would bring relief to people facing bills of thousands of pounds.

Vaginal mesh

Scotland sets aside

£1m for harmed women

Women in Scotland whose health has suffered as a result of transvaginal mesh implants are eligible to receive payments of £1000. The Scottish government set up a £1m fund to help women with costs associated with emotional or practical support arising from complications of mesh surgery. The payments are not seen as compensation “for any perceived wrongdoing



Menthol cigarettes are now banned, three years after other flavours

by the NHS.” Mesh surgery was suspended in Scotland in 2014 and halted completely in 2018.

Clinical research

Patient recruitment centres are launched

Five new regional patient recruitment centres were launched in England, aiming to provide easier access to clinical research opportunities for NHS patients and increase the number of studies in England. The centres, funded by £7m of government investment, will be managed by the National Institute for Health Research and run by five NHS trusts in Blackpool, Bradford, Exeter, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Leicester.

Talc

Baby Powder is withdrawn in North America

Johnson & Johnson will stop selling its talcum based Baby Powder in Canada and the US and instead offer a corn starch alternative. The original product will still be sold elsewhere. J&J said the decision was prompted by shifts in demand brought on by the pandemic, which had led it to discontinue more than 100 products. The company has been sued by more than 16 000 North American plaintiffs over mesothelioma or ovarian cancer allegedly caused by Baby Powder, which critics say contains asbestos. The company continues to argue that the product is safe.

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THIRD SECTOR

The government awarded more than **£22m**

in cash grants to health charities to help them continue regular activities while meeting increased demand from covid-19. Major beneficiaries include St John Ambulance

(£6.8m),

Air Ambulances UK (£6m),

and mental health charities (£4.2m)

SIXTY SECONDS ON... THE DRUGGLE



THAT'S A FUNNY WORD!

That's the point. Druggie is the name of Watford General Hospital's prescribing or drugs huddle. Started by Ashley Reece, a consultant paediatrician and director of medical education, the druggie is where everyone comes together to discuss common prescribing errors and what to look out for, and to celebrate difficult tasks done well.

HUDDLE UP

Reece, who is also the officer for assessment at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, said the idea came from a patient safety initiative piloted by the college. He said, “The huddle is a well described short intervention. I had a lightbulb moment when I thought if we're talking about safety meetings why don't we think about a medicines safety meeting, a medication safety huddle, a drugs huddle, and that's where this slightly silly name came from.”

WAS DRUGGLE A STRUGGLE TO EMBED?

While the concept of a meeting to discuss these matters isn't new, Reece said they can be difficult to embed, and that's where the name became important. “Embedding something that people take on and actually works is tricky.

But the catchy name seems to have resonated. Within a few months, people started saying, ‘Okay, now it's time for the druggie,’ and it didn't have to be led by me. The local spread has been good, and we've been able to keep it up,” he said.

‘Drug  gle’

HOW DOES IT WORK?

In Watford, pharmacists lead the druggie. Each week they create a list of prescribing learning points from the paediatric ward and present it at the end of rounds. There are three or four main points and added “gems” (things that were done well) and “pearls” (things that really need to be remembered), such as Care Quality Commission issues. The points are then emailed, to be inserted into e-portfolios as evidence of learning.

HAS IT UNCOVERED ANY DIAMONDS?

“The pharmacists report that prescribing on the whole is better: they see far less inaccurate prescriptions for tricky drug regimes,” Reece said. The initiative is now in use in other hospitals and countries.

Elisabeth Mahase, *The BMJ*

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