The Stroke Association
www.stroke.org.uk

A problem familiar to anyone providing health services, statutory or voluntary, is how to make a little go a long way. As the head of a charity, for example, do you plough the cash into your website, your telephone helpline, your regional offices or into providing every GP surgery with printed information detailing what you offer? The Stroke Association website seems to reflect that conundrum. More than 130,000 people in England and Wales suffer a stroke each year, indicating a high demand for information among patients and carers. What they have here is a portal, a point of introduction for those just beginning to seek help. But anyone – patient or professional – looking here for more in-depth data could be disappointed. That is not a criticism – it simply appears from its website that the Stroke Association spends its money elsewhere.

That said, this is a bright, attractive site from which anyone with an interest in stroke can probably gain something. But clicking through the ‘Information’ area to the section on recovery, for example, and finding two short sentences might leave site users feeling their time would be better spent looking elsewhere. There is a separate area dedicated to professionals, but again it is really a signpost pointing to other sources of information.

One interesting fact, which reflects the difficult choices charities must make in deciding where their limited funds should go, can be unearthed in the ‘Donations’ area: it takes £20 to keep the association’s helpline open for one hour. Such stark statistics explain why, for some charitable organisations, their websites are more an advert for their services than a deep well of information.

Pensions 50k fear
‘The average worker needs to stash an extra £50,000 into their pension scheme – or face poverty in retirement,’ according to The Sun.

Woman, 98, becomes computer fan
A report on BBC News online said Mary Robinson, a former village midwife, was using IT skills after completing an adult learners’ course.

Mick Butcher, 73, has passed his first academic exam 59 years after leaving school
An item in The Guardian went on to explain that Mr Butcher had gained a grade C in GCSE English.

Alabama executes cancer victim, 74
The Times said James Barney Hubbard was riddled with cancer and suffering from hepatitis and emphysema when he became the oldest US inmate to be executed since 1941. Hubbard had always denied killing Lillian Montgomery in 1977.

Diabetes lizard KO
How the The Sun headlined its item about a drug developed from a lizard offering ‘a breakthrough in treating diabetes’. It went on: ‘Scientists stumbled on the treatment when they studied the venom of the 23 inch Gila Monster, which eats four times a year.’

Scientific advances could lead to the human life span being extended to anything between 130 and 5,000 years.
From a report in The Times, quoting a speaker at an anti-ageing conference.

Care homes consumer research
As you may be aware, the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has launched a study of the care homes market for older people. Further in formation is available at www.oft.gov.uk

An extremely important part of our study involves speaking to both care home providers and their residents. We have engaged a company called FDS to carry out the consumer research strand for us. A number of care homes have been selected at random and FDS will be contacting them to ask their permission to interview a small number of their residents. We do, of course, understand that research of this nature requires careful and sensitive handling and we have consulted widely with charities and groups that represent older people to ensure this happens. Researchers from FDS have been specially selected for their skills and experience of carrying out sympathetic, personal interviews.

May we take this opportunity to assure you that our work is not part of an inspection of care homes and that all responses will be treated in complete confidence. No reference will be made to individuals or homes in the findings, which will be available free of charge as part of our final report.

If you have any questions regarding the study in general, please do not hesitate to call Yvonne Shivas on 0207 211 8325 or email carehomes@oft.gsi.gov.uk

Naja Felter, Team Leader, Markets and Policy Initiatives Division, Office of Fair Trading