**European dictators move on medicine**

A Daily Telegraph report (April 7) shocked and disgusted us. It alleged: 'A new European convention will allow medical research conducted on people who cannot consent to it, even in cases where it does not benefit them.'

It singled out children, people in permanent vegetative states and people with learning disabilities.

Britain has not yet signed up - but 21 countries have, and if the power of Europe over other matters is anything to go by we will soon be number 22. Intrusion upon a person's body constitutes an assault if done without consent. Is there no limit to the levels of dictatorship to which the European Union will stoop?

Europe's dominance over the size of bananas or the curvature of the humble cucumber are one thing, but this move goes too far.

We urge all readers to respond to this convention with the contempt it deserves. We would also like to hear from anyone who has any further information.

Liz Thorpe, Helen Lavery
Nurse Tutors, Learning Disabilities Branch, University of Nottingham

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**Support workers deserve RCN debate**

Following the failure to get a debate about support worker membership of the RCN on this year's Congress agenda, I raised a point of order to clarify the next steps. Our constitution allows us to call an extraordinary general meeting if 1,000 members petition for it. By the morning after the decision was made not to have the debate, a petition was underway with 25 per cent of the required number already signed up. However, an EGM would be expensive and time consuming.

I suggest that Council could promote a national debate among the nursing profession on this issue; providing up-to-date information on the pros and cons of extending membership; and recognising that the reason that this issue keeps bubbling up is not due to a conspiracy by those in favour of widening the membership, but because we are stuck in indecisiveness.

We need a national debate to raise awareness, we could then have a clear resolution at the AGM. Council has the power to take this initiative, and I believe it should do so in the light of the majority, albeit not the full two thirds necessary to change the RCN constitution, in favour of it at this year's Congress. The alternative will be an expensive EGM and the continued impression that Council is flustered and incapable of taking the initiative on this matter.

Steve Wright
RCN Fellow

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**Why should we work and study so hard for nothing?**

I would like to ask fellow nursing colleagues, why do we allow ourselves to be financially undervalued? Is it not time that we became more proactive in our seemingly endless struggle for fair pay? We deserve a pay scale that reflects the quality of care we deliver to members of the public.

An issue inextricably linked with this is nurse education and degree/ diploma nursing. We are encouraged by our professional organisations and our employers to further ourselves academically. Why should anyone increase their knowledge base, often in their own time and at their own financial expense, when these endeavours are not given financial recognition?

We now operate in an increasingly competitive 'free' financial market. Why is this not reflected in the remuneration we receive each month? And how are employers expected to recruit, retain and reward people for the ever-increasing skills and acknowledged responsibilities they now have?

Do employers and the government realise the damage and the demoralisation of many within their workforce because pay does not reflect the work we do?

I understand my accountability to patients, their families, partners and friends, my professional organisations, members of the multidisciplinary team, the UKCC and my employers. What about the responsibility and accountability they, especially the government, the UKCC, employers and nurses as a professional body, have to each other.

Michael Hutton
Brighton

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**International - who are you kidding?**

What a little pond we swim in - never has the Congress agenda seemed as domestic as this year in Harrogate.

We regard ourselves as a leading organisation for world nursing, but looking at the agenda, listening to the debates, you could have fooled me.

Yes, we had interesting debates, but I am disappointed that in the year of an International Council of Nurses Congress in Vancouver, which many British nurses will attend, the agenda did not reflect that.

I hope that many RCN members will promote discussion of more international issues at future RCN Congresses, and in advance of the London meeting of the ICN in 1999.

Roger Cowell, Vice Chair
RCN WING

**Be strong – better times will come**

Many thanks for the excellent article on bullying (Features May 21). I want to give hope to other nurses presently being bullied - you are not alone, there is light at the end of the tunnel if you can be strong and believe in yourself.

I had been qualified six months when I moved from Berkshire to Worcestershire. I was happy and enthusiastic
about the profession. But three months into my new post I was the victim of a long standing bully.

This nurse, who I will call Nurse A, was notorious for bullying but never challenged because management 'respected her'.

The bullying ranged from racist jokes, comments about my physique and the fact that I was 'not a local'. I was told off on a weekly basis and on one occasion I was told off for the look on my face.

I was filled with despair and depression and often came home to cry during my shift.

But I was determined not to let this bitter individual ruin my life. I kept a reflective journal and my partner was very supportive.

Now Nurse A has left. My workplace is transformed, I enjoy my job and I am given the respect and autonomy that I know I deserve.

C T

Worcestershire

**Still haunted more than two decades on**

Your article on bullying (Features May 21) was very good. I was raped by a staff nurse, and told to keep my mouth shut.

I did so and ran away from the hospital and a job that I loved. This happened 24 years ago when I was an SEN.

Would anyone have believed me? I am still having nightmares and counselling.

Name and address supplied

**Congress symptoms are awful**

I am suffering from PTCD, and as many of you will know the symptoms are awful – lethargy, depression, anxiety and a hangover-like headache. Many of you may have this problem without even realising it had a recognised term – post traumatic Congress disorder.

It is now believed that the disorder is only contagious in its incubation period (ie, during Congress), and is therefore not a threat to your friends and family at home.

Further, research carried out by the students at Congress has narrowed the carrier of this disorder to alcohol.

However, despite PTCD, I am glad I attended Congress. Mostly I have learnt that as a student I have a voice, and that if I don’t use it, I can’t expect to be heard. And no one could deny the student body was a voice to be reckoned with.

Anyway, who knows, maybe by next year there’ll be a treatment for PTCD – one that doesn’t involve the hair of the dog.

Amanda-May Jelley

London

One factor which none of us can escape is house dust. House dust contains many different elements. But the most important element as far as the allergy sufferer is concerned is the dust mites’ digestive enzymes, contained in its droppings. An overwhelming weight of evidence suggests that childhood asthma is most frequently caused by exposure to these droppings during early infancy.

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