Life expectancy is rising as dietary habits change

Average life expectancy is increasing by two years every decade, according to government figures on social trends published last week.

Just over half of men and two fifths of women were overweight when the statistics were compiled. They also show that dietary habits are changing, with each person eating an average 4.5 ounces of breakfast cereal per week in 1993, three quarters more than in 1971.

But men in unskilled manual jobs were still three times more likely to smoke than those in the professional group. Although death rates from lung cancer among men fell by almost a half between 1971 and 1992, those for women increased by a sixth.

Figures on health also show that suicide is three times more common among men than women.

IN BRIEF

- More than 500 children treated at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Brighton have been called for tuberculosis skin tests after a nurse was found to be suffering from the disease.
- A spokesperson for the trust said the risk of infection was 'very slight'. The nurse is now recovering at home.
- The first London-based Brook Advisory centre to include a screening service for sexually transmitted diseases and HIV testing recently opened at St Thomas' Hospital.
- St Thomas' Brook has been set up to enable nurses, doctors and counsellors to advise young people on contraception, give pregnancy tests, undertake counselling for relationship or sexual problems, and screen for STDS and HIV - all under one roof.
- The clinic is open on Monday evenings from 4.30pm to 6.30pm. Enquiries can be made directly by telephone 0171-928 9292 x1690.

ENB proposals for removal of staff/student ratio criticised

by Jean Gray

The Royal College of Midwives is seeking immediate talks with the English National Board over plans to remove a recommended number of staff to students in regulations for approving training courses.

Julia Allison, RCM general secretary, said removing a recommended number of staff from the guidelines will 'undermine education and practice standards in midwifery'.

She added: 'As a result of the ENB decision, midwife teachers will be significantly disadvantaged in their efforts to provide professional education which is clinically based. This move is not in the public interest,'

Current ENB regulations and guidelines recommend ratios of one tutor to 15 health students in regulations for approving training courses.

The RCM is also concerned about lack of consultation on the decision. But ENB assistant chief executive Rita Le Var commented: 'It was based fully on research commissioned to help us and included all the institutions in the country. All those who are interested have the opportunity to see the reports.'

Further work is being carried out to identify 'more sensitive and appropriate' quality indicators for education programmes.

Government boosts GP fundholding projects

The Government has given a boost to GP purchasing by doubling the number of pilot 'total fundholding' projects from 25 to 50, health secretary Virginia Bottomley announced at a conference in London last week.

Addressing a National Association of Health Authorities and Trusts conference on primary care, Mrs Bottomley said she wanted the benefits of GP fundholding 'to extend as widely as possible'.

"Developing primary care will be hard work and not just for GPs" she said. "They need help from their teams, recognition from the local authority, co-operation from trusts and support from managers and fellow professionals."

Referring to the work being done by the new health authorities, she added the success of primary care depended on the partnership success between health authorities, GPs, GP fundholders and primary care practitioners.

The new health authorities will be 'better placed' to look at all the health needs of their populations and secure the right mix of services, she said and urged community nurses and primary care workers 'to inform the strategic decisions taken by health authorities'.

The pilots given the power to purchase all services will be evaluated over a two-year period.