

CORPORATE HEALTHCARE BULLETIN 19/2

More free time equals better health

A three-day weekend may be the key to greater productivity, less stress and a healthier workforce.

Last year a team at Oxford University's Said Business School, tracked 5,000 call centre workers after they switched down from working five days a week to four. Analysis of workforce performance data showed greater happiness, improved productivity and less sick days.

Now the Wellcome Trust, a major biomedical research charity based in London with more than 2,000 employees, is set to follow suit. The aim is to allow staff to volunteer, learn new skills, care for relatives and spend more time with their families.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/01/18/four-day-working-week-considerd-staff-wellcome-trust/>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/09/30/four-day-working-week-would-boost-productivity-happiness-oxford/>

<http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20180828-just-how-short-could-we-make-the-workweek>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/02/no-downside-new-zealand-firm-adopts-four-day-week-after-successful-trial>

Knowing when a pill does you ill

Furious medical debate continues about what pill to take when. A study of 160,000 healthy aspirin users by King's College London showed the 'worried well' taking daily aspirin in the hopes of reducing risk of heart disease, increased their risk of internal bleeding by 43% while reducing heart attack or stroke risk by only 11%. But a University of California study of 266 patients with various types of cancer, found the anti-inflammatory properties of aspirin combined with ibuprofen, increased five year survival from 25% to

78%. Arguments about the use of statins are even more heated. An Oxford University report claimed 8,000 heart disease and stroke deaths a year could be delayed among over 75 year-olds if everyone in this age group took statins. Doctors questioned the statistics. Others pointed to review of 40 other statin studies which concluded the drug's harmful side-effects were likely to cancel out any benefits for most people.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-6619267/Daily-aspirin-does-harm-good-worried-well.html>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2019/01/25/ibuprofen-aspirin-triples-cancer-survival-patients-study-suggests/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-47058919>

<https://annals.org/aim/article-abstract/2717122/weighing-harms-benefits-using-statins-primary-prevention-raising-risk-threshold>

A touch of cancer



An American doctor has been arguing with a British doctor in the pages of the British Medical Journal about whether it might be better to use another name for cancer in low risk patients. Laura Esserman an oncologist from the University of California San Francisco, says women with frequently over diagnosed conditions such as ductal carcinoma in situ breast cancer, should be told they have an 'indolent lesion,' to avoid the 'psychological, physical and financial trauma of unnecessary invasive investigation and treatment.'

Murali Varma a specialist pathologist from Cardiff University counters by saying that introducing new names for cancer will just cause confusion and more anxiety. She argues that cutting out a cancer tumour to diagnose it may alter the behaviour of any cancer cells left behind. "It is impossible to determine the natural course of any low risk tumour ...because it is impossible to know how the tumour would have behaved if left untreated," she says.

<https://www.bmj.com/content/364/bmj.k4699>

Brain currents



More dissent is emerging about the use of electrical current to treat mental illness. A new technique called magnetic EEG/ECG guided resonant therapy or MeRT, shows promise as a treatment for post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), while concern is growing about the continuing use of little-understood electro convulsive therapy (ECT) in non-consenting patients.

MeRT is said to 'recalibrate' brain frequency, and has been successfully used on more than 600 US ex-servicemen suffering PTSD.

Meanwhile an investigation by The Sunday Mirror using Freedom of Information requests, revealed more than 5,000 people, some as young as 16, received ECT for mental illness at levels up to 460 volts in a two year period. The treatment, meant to be given as a last resort, is often viewed as a quick cheap fix, but can damage memory or trigger dementia.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-6617117/Hope-veterans-PTSD-Brain-zapping-technique-eased-symptoms-60-4-weeks.html>

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/vulnerable-teenagers-subjected-brain-electro-13848319>

Operations booked for holidaying surgeons

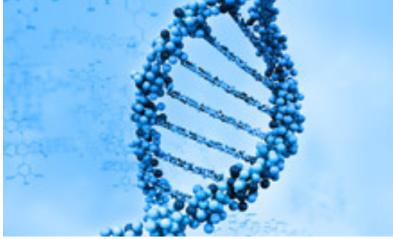


NHS Improvement has reported that almost 300,000 extra operations could be done every year if hospitals checked to see if surgeons booked for theatre lists were on holiday. Every day theatre staff turn up all scrubbed only to discover no-one's there to do the surgery. NHS Improvement has suggested surgical staff should agree annual leave and surgical lists, and double check staff availability ahead of the planned operating day. The 300,000 figure matches a 2002 Audit Commission report highlighting exactly the same number of wasted operations. It seems the NHS has wasted four or five million more operations since its managers first realised they had a problem.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/02/04/300000-extra-operations-could-carried-every-year-surgeons-planned/>

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/4182399/Inefficient-hospitals-could-do-300000-extra-operations.html>

Exploiting our genes



The Medical Research Council is trying to identify genes predicting lifespan. Edinburgh University scientists have compared genetic data from 500,000 people with records of their parents' lifespan and developed a scoring system showing a five-year variation in life expectancy caused by genes.

An NHS project to offer £150 whole genome analysis to healthy people has come under fire from doctors who pointed out that people who know their genetic risk of particular conditions may be offered extra screening not available to those without genetic knowledge. The NHS insisted the offer was merely to build up a gene research database.

From 2019 onwards NHS gene sequencing to provide personalised cancer treatment will be offered to around 1800 children a year, and to some adults with rare cancers. The service is still not available to most adult patients meaning many will continue to be exposed to harmful side effects from drugs which may be completely ineffective.

<https://www.bristol.ac.uk/integrative-epidemiology/seminars/2018/seminar-peter-joshi.html>

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/gene-tests-threaten-core-nhs-principle-mx05bg22j>

<https://www.bmj.com/content/364/bmj.l105>