

Corporate Healthcare Bulletin

June 2019



Is retirement going out of fashion?

The actress playing Peggy Archer in the long-running radio soap just celebrated her 100th birthday, while Nicholas Parsons presenter of another BBC institution Just A Minute, will be 96 in October. Latest figures from the Office of National Statistics show thousands more people are shunning retirement: The number of workers aged over 70 has more than doubled in a decade to almost 500,000, including 53,000 aged over 80. Other research has shown the use it or lose it principle applies as much to maintaining a healthy mind as a fit body. Last year a study of 3,400 civil servants found their short-term memory declined 40% faster post retirement – apparently because of the loss of mental stimulation provided by work.

<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2019/may/27/number-of-over-70s-still-in-work-more-than-doubles-in-a-decade>
<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/working-later-in-life-can-pay-off-in-more-than-just-income>
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2018/01/22/retirement-causes-brain-function-rapidly-decline-warn-scientists/>

Severe obesity increases early death risk by 50%

According to a study of health records of 2.8m British people, the fattest individuals have a 12 times greater risk of developing diabetes with all its fatal complications; a four times greater risk of heart failure, and 22 times the risk of sleep apnoea where breathing intermittently stops because of the weight of fat round the airways. Unsurprisingly, health decline was worst among those already suffering chronic illness before they gained weight.

This link between obesity and disease also applies to cancer. Being severely overweight under the age of 50 increases risk of fatal pancreatic cancer by 25%, while another study showed that chunky thighs and stomach in men increase prostate cancer risk.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/apr/29/severely-obese-people-in-middle-age-50-more-likely-to-die-early-study-finds>
https://eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2019-06/w-bfd060519.php
<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/03/190331192525.htm>

A new way to incentivise dieters

A new weight control incentive could emerge with the introduction of weight limits for flying taxis. Uber is introducing the idea with its flying taxi trial in Melbourne, Australia. Groups of passengers using the service will be weighed along with their bags before they board. If they are too heavy their party may have to ditch not only a bag but a passenger as well.

Elsewhere there are suggestions of weighing passengers to calculate fuel requirements which could have interesting repercussions on price.

<https://www.pressreader.com/uk/daily-mail/20190612/281552292366694>
https://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel_news/article-6936237/Is-weighing-passengers-flights-off.html



Rising stress levels in the workforce

Stress related absence has risen during the past year in 40% of 1,000 companies participating in a regular Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) annual survey. Poor management was a key reason, with 63% of respondents saying people at their companies were required to use holidays to complete work tasks, and 83% saying they suffered a culture of presenteeism where people had to be seen at work even if they had little or nothing to do. The CIPD has called for managers to receive better mental healthcare training while Personnel Today magazine published comments criticising workers for not taking more responsibility for their own overall health.

https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/health-and-well-being-at-work-2019_tcm18-55881.pdf
<https://www.personneltoday.com/hr/poor-management-has-led-to-spike-in-stress-absence/>



An all-clear prostate test for life

Men of a healthy weight are still at risk of prostate cancer, but help may soon be at hand to determine who does or doesn't need to worry about developing the disease. Following a study underway at University College Hospital, London, supermarkets could offer MRI prostate cancer scans to men, which would tell them once and for all if they are among the fortunate majority who will never develop the disease. Current blood marker testing is highly unreliable and Professor Mark Emberton who is running the trial, says it will identify men who can be given a definitive all-clear, an advance which will save millions of pounds by avoiding unnecessary treatment which often leaves men incontinent and impotent.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/simple-prostate-cancer-test-can-give-all-clear-for-life-zc3vxlhkz>

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2019/jun/prostate-cancer-trial-could-lead-national-screening-programme>

Hospital out-patient appointments cancelled

Nine million hospital appointments were cancelled at the last minute according to latest NHS data, with as many as one in four appointments cancelled in some areas because of staff shortages. The consequence is many people suffer worsening health while waiting for diagnosis – and therefore require more expensive treatment. One case highlighted was that of a 29 year-old nurse from Devon who waited more than two years for an appointment to treat crippling endometriosis where uterine tissue grows outside the womb. The appointment was cancelled by the hospital less than an hour before the nurse was due to attend. At the time of writing no new date had been booked.

As a result, there is a growing opinion that Predict should form part of pre-treatment protocols in the NHS and private sector.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/04/26/alarm-raised-tripling-cancelled-nhs-appointments/>

Gene silencing to cure inherited disease

Doctors have used 'gene silencing' – blocking genetic messages that transmit faulty instructions, to treat 94 people with porphyria, an excruciatingly painful inherited blood disorder believed to have caused the madness of King George III. Huntington's disease which is caused by a toxic protein killing brain cells, is the next target for the technique, and treatment for more conditions will follow. Curing porphyria involves monthly injections with a drug called givosiran. At the moment these therapies are prohibitively expensive – a recent gene trial for a rare form of blindness priced the treatment at £650,000 and no price has been given for givosiran. However, it is expected that costs will fall dramatically as the new field develops.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/wonder-drug-fights-gene-linked-to-king-george-s-madness-porphyrria-0vgtvcl62>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-47907971>



Progress against pain

Over use of painkillers and subsequent fatal opioid addiction has been highlighted by a pan-European report, demonstrating the urgent need for an answer to the problem of pain control. Ultrasound is now emerging as an alternative solution, with studies showing that regular treatment sessions can 'turn down' inflammatory response in the spleen or be used in a highly focused way to block pain response in the brain. Ultimately, devices could be rented out for home use by patients as a means of controlling arthritis pain and other chronic conditions.

<http://www.oecd.org/health/addressing-problematic-opioid-use-in-oecd-countries-a18286f0-en.htm>

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-019-08721-0>

<https://www.fusfoundation.org/the-foundation/news-media/first-patient-treated-in-us-neuropathic-pain-clinical-trial>