



Europe is a "second class continent" for cancer research

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In brief**China releases SARS**

whistleblower: Jiang Yanyong, who exposed China's under-reporting of the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome in 2003 (*BMJ* 2004;329:130), has been released from eight months of house arrest in Beijing but is still barred from talking to the media. His release is thought to be connected to the recent visit to Beijing of the US secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice.

India's parliament approves

patent law changes: Despite protests from opposition parties the Indian parliament has approved a controversial bill that will permit product patents on drugs made in India (*BMJ* 2005;330:692, 6 Mar). The bill will stop drug companies making generic versions of new patented drugs.

US researcher admits

falsifying data: Eric Poehlman, formerly professor of medicine at the University of Vermont College of Medicine, has admitted falsifying data on 17 US federal grant applications, including one to the National Institutes of Health in 1999 worth \$542 000 (£290 000; €420 000). A former research assistant blew the whistle on Professor Poehlman, who has published more than 200 articles in international journals.

Number of avian flu cases

continues to increase: The outbreak of H5N1 avian influenza claimed its 35th victim in Vietnam when a 17 year old woman died on 25 March. A day earlier Cambodia confirmed its second death from avian influenza in the province bordering Vietnam and also announced its first confirmed domestic outbreak of avian influenza among poultry.

Tuberculosis prevalence falls,

except in Africa: The *Global Tuberculosis Control* report for 2005 finds that the prevalence of tuberculosis has fallen by more than 20% worldwide since 1990, except in Africa, where rates have tripled since 1990 in countries with a high prevalence of HIV (see www.who.int/).

US Supreme Court refuses to intervene in "right to die" caseFred Charatan *Florida*

The parents of Terri Schiavo, the brain damaged Florida woman who has been on a life support machine since a cardiac arrest 15 years ago, have had to abandon their attempt to save their daughter's life after the US Supreme Court last week refused to hear an emergency appeal from them.

The Supreme Court's decision effectively endorsed a decision by a Florida judge on Tuesday 22 March, which was supported by a panel of appeal judges the next day, not to intervene to force doctors to reinstate Mrs Schiavo's feeding tube.

The parents' final appeal to the Supreme Court was the latest twist in the highly complex legal battle between them and her husband over whether the 41 year old woman should

live or be allowed to die. The Supreme Court's decision means that Mrs Schiavo, whose feeding tube was removed on 18 March, is expected to die shortly.

The long running saga came to a head earlier in March when a Florida appeals court decided it would not interfere in the decision of doctors to remove Mrs Schiavo's feeding tubes.

However, Mrs Schiavo's parents, the Schindlers, filed an emergency motion to the Florida Supreme Court on 17 March to overturn this decision, a day before the tube was due to be removed.

The next day the US House of Representatives and US Senate voted to block the removal of the feeding tube (*BMJ* 2005;330:687, 26 Mar). The

Senate then passed an emergency bill on 21 March, signed by President Bush, that forced the case into a federal court.

But despite the actions by the Senate, Judge James Whittemore, in the US district court in Tampa, Florida, decided not to order the reinsertion of the feeding tube. The appeals court in Atlanta later upheld Judge Whittemore's ruling.

Meanwhile, an account of the case was published online ahead of print on 22 March in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (www.nejm.org, doi: 10.1056/NEJMp058062). It was written by Timothy Quill, a prominent authority on end of life issues, professor of medicine, and the director of the Center for Palliative Care and Clinical Ethics at the University of Rochester Medical Center, New York.

Dr Quill comments: "This voice [of the patient's] is what counts the most, and in the Terri Schiavo case it has been largely drowned out by a very loud, self-interested public debate." □

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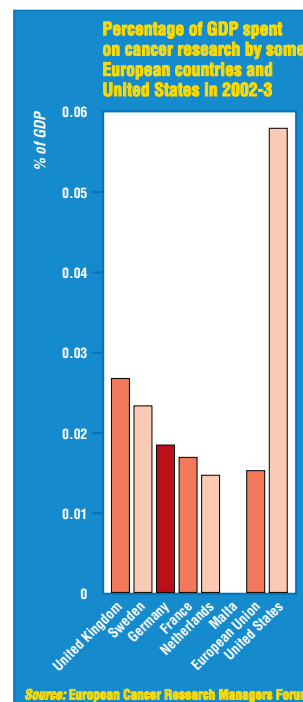
Funding for cancer research in the European Union lags far behind that in the United States and varies enormously from one EU country to another, a new survey by the European Cancer Research Managers Forum shows.

Produced with the support of the European Commission, the survey is the first comprehensive analysis of cancer research funding in Europe. It identified 139 sources of non-commercial financing that provided €1.43bn (£1bn; \$1.9bn) in 2002-3.

The investigation by the forum, which was set up in 2001 to promote networking and cooperation among national funding bodies and strategic decision makers, showed that the gap between the EU and the United States in this area is much wider than originally thought. US per capita spending (€17.63) is seven times that in the EU

(€2.56), and its spending as a percentage of gross domestic product is four times that in the EU.

Commenting on the finding, Richard Sullivan, the forum's chairman, said: "This gap is a substantial threat to the ability of the EU to translate cancer research into patient benefit."



The discrepancies are even more marked between countries in the EU. In the study period (2002-3) the country that spent the most was the United Kingdom (€388m), while Malta spent nothing. Britain also leads when funding is expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product, followed by Sweden, Germany, France, and the Netherlands.

The survey shows that the EU concentrates much of its spending on basic research, at the expense of preventive and clinical research. Biology receives 41% of all cancer research funding, compared with 20% for treatment and 4% for prevention. The corresponding figures in the US are 25%, 25%, and 9%.

Gordon McVie, senior consultant to the European Institute of Oncology in Milan, described the findings as "a clarion call" to the European Commission, which awarded around €90m to research in this area, to increase its funding.

"The survey shows that Europe is a second class continent in terms of cancer research funding," he said. □

The European cancer research funding survey is available at www.ecrmforum.org