

Dementia miracle drug 'will go to waste' without rise in diagnoses

By Laura Donnelly HEALTH EDITOR

THE first drug to reverse dementia will be wasted on Britain unless it dramatically improves diagnosis rates, experts have warned.

Next week, trials are expected to show injections of lecanemab can significantly slow the disease and decrease

memory decline. Scientists have already hailed early results as a "historic moment" after it was shown to cut progress of the disease by 27 per cent.

But there are fears that poor diagnosis rates – which have fallen since the pandemic – means thousands of people who could benefit will never get the drug. Official estimates show 62

per cent of cases in England are diagnosed, down from 67.4 per cent in February 2020.

And even those who are diagnosed are unlikely to get the types of scans which are required to see if a person could benefit from lecanemab.

Writing in *The Sunday Telegraph*, Dr Richard Oakley, associate director of

research at Alzheimer's Society, said that lecanemab has indicated "a promising route to slow down deterioration in thinking and memory skills", but added: "Without even knowing the cost of rolling out this drug, we're already up against three barriers in the UK. First, diagnosis rates are at a five-year low in the UK and stagnating. Second, varia-

tion in dementia diagnosis guidelines across the UK means that some people could be diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease without a clinician confirming if that they have amyloid in their brain, and would therefore benefit from a drug like lecanemab.

"Third, the UK's access and availability of brain scanning equipment lan-

guishes at the bottom of international tables."

Data show that as of 2019, Britain has 70 PET-CT scanning locations. A 2021 audit showed that just 76.9 per cent of memory services could refer people for PET scans and 44 per cent for CSF tests, which test for amyloid protein in the fluid around the brain and spinal cord.

Pfizer boss taken to task for jab advice to children

By Camilla Turner CHIEF POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT

PFIZER'S chief executive has been rebuked by the UK's pharmaceutical watchdog for making "misleading" statements about children's vaccines, *The Sunday Telegraph* can disclose.

Dr Albert Bourla in a BBC interview last December claimed "there is no doubt in my mind that the benefits, completely, are in favour of" vaccinating those aged five to 11 against Covid.

He argued that "Covid in schools is thriving", adding: "This is disturbing, significantly, the educational system, and there are kids that will have severe symptoms." The interview was published on Dec 2 – before the vaccine had been approved by Britain's medical regulator for this age group.

Shortly after publication, a complaint was submitted to the pharmaceutical watchdog – the Prescription Medicines Code of Practice Authority (PMCPA) – by UsForThem, a parent campaign group set up to promote the plight of children during the pandemic. The complaint alleged that Dr Bourla's remarks about the children's vaccine were "disgracefully misleading", arguing that it breached several clauses of the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry's code of practice.

In September 2021, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), had advised against a mass rollout for children aged 12 to 15, citing the low risk to healthy children.

But less than a fortnight later, ministers gave the green light for youngsters

to be given a single dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech jab. It was not until February 2022 that the JCVI ruled that children aged five to 11 could be offered the jab.

A code of practice panel, convened by the PMCPA, found Pfizer breached the code in a number of ways, including misleading the public, making unsubstantiated claims and failing to present information in a factual, balanced way.

Pfizer appealed against the findings, strongly refuting UsForThem's claims that Dr Bourla had breached the code of practice. They argued that his remarks were based on "up-to-date scientific evidence" and could be substantiated by the "publicly available independent benefit-risk assessments".

Earlier this month an appeal board met to consider their arguments. The breaches relating to misleading the public, making unsubstantiated claims and the lack of balance were upheld.

The more serious findings – including that Pfizer had brought discredit to the industry, had encouraged irrational use of a medicine and had failed to maintain high standards – were overturned. PMCPA said the full case report will be published in the coming weeks.

Pfizer said it is "committed to the highest levels of integrity in any interaction with the public".

It added: "We are pleased the UK's PMCPA appeal board found Pfizer to have maintained high standards and upheld confidence in our industry, the two most serious rulings in this complaint from a UK campaign group." UsForThem was approached for comment.



Family time Madonna, 64, celebrates Thanksgiving in New York with her six children – Lourdes, 26, Rocco, 22, David, 17, Mercy James, 16, and twins Estere and Stelle, 10.

NHS app to help obese lose fifth of body weight

By Laura Donnelly HEALTH EDITOR

THE NHS is to roll out diet coach apps and drugs that could help people lose up to a fifth of their body weight.

Ministers will today announce a £20million research project to develop and fast-track digital tools and treatments to help people shed the pounds. Almost two in three adults in England are overweight or obese, fuelling record levels of deadly conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. Obesity costs the NHS £6billion a year, which is forecast to reach almost £10billion by 2050.

Officials said research so far had found some medication and technology, including online portals that encourage lifestyle changes, could help people lose up to a fifth of their weight.

A third of those prescribed diabetes drug Semaglutide in trials lost up to 20 per cent of their body weight. The drug – which works by hijacking the body's own appetite-regulating system in the brain, leading to reduced hunger – has been described as "game changing".

A study of Tirzepatide, another diabetes drug, found patients put on the highest dose on average also lost 20 per cent of their body weight.

Some parts of the NHS already offer behavioural coaching via apps, as well as trackers and calorie counters. Other schemes being tested include brain training on smartphones to help dieters resist temptation.

One Cardiff University study found using online games to boost willpower can help users cut 200 calories a day.

Steve Barclay, the Health Secretary, said: "We are fast-tracking the most promising treatments and technologies to NHS patients to help them achieve a healthy weight, save the NHS billions of pounds and increase life expectancy."

The move is part of a Vaccine Taskforce approach to tackling some of the leading public health issues that damage the economy and drain NHS resources.

The Government will tomorrow launch four healthcare missions – covering obesity, cancer, mental health and addiction – to quickly develop and deliver new treatments.

Scandal-hit hospital denies gas and air to pregnant women

By Joe Pinkstone SCIENCE CORRESPONDENT

PREGNANT women are being forced to give birth without gas and air at a scandal-hit hospital, it has emerged.

Gas and air, known as Entonox, is working normally at the William Harvey Hospital in Ashford, Kent, but it is not being given to patients after tests revealed staff on the ward were being subjected to levels of nitrous oxide that exceeded the threshold for long-term safe exposure.

Gas and air can therefore not be given to any patient in need of pain relief until a new extractor fan system is installed, which may take up to two weeks.

Entonox, which is equal parts oxygen and nitrous oxide, is also known as laughing gas, and is a common pain reliever in labour.

It poses no risk to mothers or children but prolonged exposure can have negative effects on health.

The hospital, which is part of the East

Kent NHS Trust, was found by a landmark report to have failed mothers and children, as was the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother hospital in Margate.

Dozens of mothers and babies died as a result of repeated maternity findings, the report found.

The nitrous oxide exposure tests and the ventilation issue is not believed to be related to the findings of the report.

The William Harvey Hospital has purchased a new ventilatory machine called a scavenging system that removes anaesthetic gases from the air.

Such systems are commonplace in hospital wards and theatres, and it is expected to be installed within one to two weeks.

The Telegraph understands there are about 60 women due to give birth at the hospital in this timeframe and gas and air will be unavailable for these births.

Women who had planned to give birth at the hospital are being contacted about the situation and are expected to be told to go to the Queen Elizabeth the

Queen Mother hospital, which is an hour's drive away in Margate, if they want gas and air. Women who opt to give birth in the Ashford hospital will still have every other form of anaesthetic available to them, such as an epidural.

The East Kent Hospitals University Trust said in a statement on its website: "Due to a ventilation issue, the current levels of gas in the air could affect the health of staff who work for long periods in the labour rooms. Mums and babies are not at risk of harm."

"Excessive exposure to nitrous oxide can lead to B12 deficiency which is easily treatable if detected."

"There are also reports that long-term exposure may cause, in rare cases, nerve damage and also in rare cases may cause miscarriage in the first trimester of pregnancy," the trust added.

The hospital is now offering blood tests to affected staff and is relocating any pregnant staff members as a precautionary measure.



Freeze frame Rachel Spelling applies the finishing touches to one of her creations showing miniatures on paint charts. Lockdown gave her the idea when she decided to shrink her work.

Give us a Greta to lead fight against superbugs, say scientists

By Joe Pinkstone SCIENCE CORRESPONDENT

A GRETA THUNBERG-like figure is needed to spearhead the fight against superbugs, scientists have suggested.

Superbugs, or antimicrobial resistance (AMR), are considered a silent pandemic posing a threat to humanity, as bacteria evolve to nullify antibiotics.

Medicine would return to the dark ages should antibiotics fail, with post-surgery infections rife, colds proving fatal and a blister leading to sepsis.

Prof Dame Sally Davies, the UK's special envoy on AMR, said superbugs "may be the defining health challenge of this century".

But there is still a lack of public attention around the topic. Scientists are

understood to want a face to do for AMR what Thunberg did for climate change.

Dr Hannah Balkhy, assistant director general for AMR at the World Health Organisation, said: "AMR doesn't have a face for a reason; it's difficult."

David Sweetnam, chairman of the Ineos Oxford Institute Advisory Board, said: "We need a poster girl to get the politicians to allocate resources."

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