



WAKE UP!! IT'S YER GOVT. HEALTH WARNING...

# SchNEWS

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I'M SORRY MRS SMITH, BUT ACCORDING TO THE NEW DATABASE, YOU'RE DEAD. IT WON'T LET ME PRESCRIBE THAT LIFE-SAVING MEDICATION



## IT Go Home

**"The National Programme for IT is bringing modern computer systems into the NHS to improve the patient experience."**  
- Department of Health.

Don't worry if you can't find an NHS dentist in your area, have been waiting months for a vital operation or have had a few painful hours in Casualty waiting to be treated – your "experience" is going to be improved with a wonderful new computer system!

Rather than recruit more nurses and pay them a decent wage, or build a few more hospitals, the government in its infinite wisdom has decided to spend anywhere between £18-£31 billion over the next ten years on a new computer system for the Health Service.

This government is obsessed with new computer databases and thinks that this is the way to run everything "more efficiently" – from benefits to passports, the Child Support Agency to air traffic control. But in every case the computer system has fucked up and gone way over budget. So do you trust the government to run a £30 billion IT system of sensitive and personal information? Well it's not actually the government that runs the databases of course, they're "outsourced" to a whatever private company bids lowest. Two companies involved are Ovum who specialize in "Advising on the commercial impact of technology and market changes in telecoms, software and IT services" and Gartner who "will provide market intelligence of the global IT marketplace." Neither company appears to know one end of a doctor's stethoscope from another, but having knowledge of the Health Service doesn't matter. Does it?

At the heart of "The National Programme for IT" (NPfIT) is a new booking system for appointments called "Choose and Book" which is supposed to offer patients a choice of when and where their operation will take place (How about - at a local hospital as soon as possible, or is that too much to ask?). NPfIT is to go nationwide by the end of this year as does the Integrated Care Record Service (ICRS), which will be a national medical database of all NHS patients. The NPfIT isn't going too well so far though: this week the National Audit Office said that in the pilot scheme only 63 out of an expected 205,000 hospital referrals were made using the booking system. The British Medical Association (BMA) has expressed concern that the system could compromise patient confidentiality and has warned GPs against taking part in the trials. They've reminded doctors the operating system was not a contractual obligation and they can decline to be involved. Only 27% of GPs have said they are willing to use the Choose and Book system.

The BMA says the software behind it is flawed - every time a patient makes a booking, the hospital will automatically download a copy of the patient's medical record from the Integrated Care Record Service, a system the BMA is not satisfied is secure, they say "We are extremely concerned that there are a number of unresolved issues relating to Choose and Book which could jeopardise the confidentiality and security of patient records. We are also concerned about the workload and resource implications." Trial schemes of the Choose and Book system have run into trouble already, which doesn't bode well for a system expected to handle 13 million outpatient consultations, four million emergency admissions and 617 million prescriptions a year.

The system is so flawed that anyone with access to the system can access any patient's records and make changes. One senior physician involved in the project said: "It's a system that's just asking to be abused." In addition to allowing any user to access a patient's records, the system does not keep sensitive details such as HIV and pregnancy terminations from being made available on the NHS's central computer. The central computer managing the Choose and Book system has also proved unreliable. It often works slowly and has crashed for long periods.

### Stitched Up!

And what of us lowly patients – what say have we had in the system of centralizing our health records? What guarantee is there that our confidential records will be safe?

The national database of medical records is being created without patients' consent and while the Health Authorities tell us our data will be safe and our authorization will be required for access, this is a lie. The data will be made available to a range of authorities such as the police under rather vague "special circumstances". These "special circumstances" have not been defined but probably include political protests, petty crime, and to harass ethnic minorities or the poorest in society.

A major worry is about the confidentiality of the database – after all who wants the highly sensitive information about their health to be

### CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

#### Flap Flip Flop!

Prolific peace campaigner Lindis Percy was arrested outside US spy base Menwith Hill for waving an upside down US flag with the words "The shame of Iraq" written on it. According to one flipped out police officer "it was dangerous... and she might flap it"! On the same day two other peace protesters had their car searched under the Terrorism Act. Lindis has now been arrested eight times outside Menwith in as many weeks.  
[www.caab.org.uk](http://www.caab.org.uk)

accessed by any Tom, Dick or Harry (Shipman)? The fundamental problem with a central database of medical records is that it undermines the relationship a patient has with their doctor. As Paul Steventon a GP and chair of the Doctors Independent Network says "Potential exists in the ICRS as it is currently envisaged for the permanent destruction of the privacy of UK citizens. Irreparable damage to the profession and practice of medicine in Britain is an inevitable consequence."

The previous Home Secretary David Blunkett has talked about linking the NHS database to the proposed ID card scheme, if Blunkett had had his way the police, social services, etc. would all be allowed access to the database and see your personal health records; our accidents and their circumstances; our sexual relations and next of kin. Medical records can reveal private facts and relations and they can be humiliating. Medical records should be strictly confidential between a doctor and their patient, no-one else should have access to this information.

And while we hear bland assurances about how all the information will be confidential, how do we know what will happen in the future? Once the database is up and running it would be very easy for the government to relax the legal terms and conditions for access. This government has already under the guise of the "war on terror" pushed through laws eroding the rights of minorities and protesters. It is a business-bent government, which one day may give way to the interests of private companies such as insurance agencies or employers and concede access to them.

If you aren't too happy with your medical records being shared on a massive database, let your GP know, remember GPs don't have to take part in the scheme and many are hostile to it. Ask your doctor not to take part in the "Choose and Book" system and do not give them your consent to book appointments for you through it. Ask your GP to stick to the boycott of the Integrated Care Record Service. More info: Brighton Against Databases, email [brighton\\_against\\_databases@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:brighton_against_databases@yahoo.co.uk)  
\* Defy ID discussion next Wednesday  
26th Cowley Club, 12 London Rd., Brighton  
6.30pm [www.defy-id.org.uk/resources.htm](http://www.defy-id.org.uk/resources.htm)

### FANCY GETTING INVOLVED WITH SCHNEWS?

Come and find out how you can help get involved in writing and researching Wed 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 12 noon  
Want to help with our web site? - Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 6pm (people with some web knowledge only please).  
Book your place now  
[schnews@brighton.co.uk](mailto:schnews@brighton.co.uk) / 01273 685913

## Water Palavar

Five years ago the Bolivian city of Cochabamba erupted in riots against Bechtel, the California-based multinational that had bought up their water and was selling it back at kerr-azy prices. The water privatization was forced on Bolivia by the World Bank as a loan condition in '97. Bechtel were forced to leave the country, but government repression left more than a hundred wounded and a 17-year-old boy dead.

Bechtel sued for \$25 million, drawing a firestorm of international protest, which made them settle for only 30 cents and they slunk off with their tail between their legs. The Abengoa Corporation of Spain, Bechtel's co-investors, haven't got the message yet though. They are still demanding compensation for lost profits.

Now the city of El Alto, two hundred miles to the north, is doing the same against a local company led by the French water giant, Suez. El Alto is a growing urban sprawl that sits 14,000 feet above sea level and is populated by waves of impoverished families arriving from the economically desperate countryside.

Community groups in El Alto say that company has raised water prices by 35% since it took over. The cost for new families to hook their homes up to water and sewage is more than six month's income at the national minimum wage, and those outside the centre get no clean water or sewers at all. Lack of access to clean water is a chief cause of child illness in Bolivia, where nearly one in ten children dies before the age of five. Families living in El Alto's outskirts rely on water from wells contaminated with industrial waste. By failing to expand water infrastructure to these fast-growing neighbourhoods, the company has left more than 200,000 people with no possibility of access to water at all. "Without water there is no life," says Julian Perez, an advisor to the Federation of El Alto Neighborhoods, "so really it is life that the company is depriving the people of El Alto."

The President of Bolivia has issued a formal decree that the country is taking back control of the water. Suez Corporation says it isn't ready to leave. This is where the El Alto water revolt stood at the end of last week. Suez are enjoying the sunshine and seem to think their little business venture is going well. A Suez spokesperson declared that "Shareholders will use all the legal recourses at their disposal to protect their rights. Ending a contract that is compliant and obtaining indisputable results will not be an easy task for the Bolivian government."

To their credit, the government hasn't shot anybody and is in agreement with the people of El Alto that Suez has failed them and should leave. Bolivia is in turmoil nationally with huge nationwide protests over gas prices. Fuel protests forced the resignation of former President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in October 2003 and his successor President Carlos Mesa has threatened to resign if the current protests turned violent.

The underlying theme is the struggle of the Bolivian people to keep some control over their country's natural resources and to resist the plunder that has been going on since the Spanish landed. When Suez leave, as it seems they will, where will the money come from to provide the people of Bolivia with water?

\* For updates see [www.democracyctr.org](http://www.democracyctr.org)

\* While yer at it, read 'Cochabamba! Water War in Bolivia' by Oscar Olivera & Tom Lewis, South End Press, 2004.

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## SchNEWS in brief

'**Terror Suspect's Dad**' - a documentary about Barbar Ahmad, another victim of the 'war on terror' who faces extradition to the US (see SchNEWS 474) - is on BBC2 next Weds 26<sup>th</sup>, 10pm [www.freebarahmad.com](http://www.freebarahmad.com) \*\* In the build-up to the **Kyoto Climate March** on Feb 12<sup>th</sup> there's a couple of public meetings being held around the country, including one in **Brighton next Thursday (27<sup>th</sup>)** 6pm, at Chichester Lecture Theatre, University of Sussex. For other talks 02088553327 [www.campaigncc.org](http://www.campaigncc.org) \*\* **Stop the Removals Demonstration** against the government's forced deportation of Zimbabwean asylum seekers, Sat 29<sup>th</sup>, 1-5pm, Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London. [stoptheremovals\\_zimbabwe@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:stoptheremovals_zimbabwe@yahoo.co.uk) \*\* **Glasgow Anarchist Day School** Sat 29<sup>th</sup> Jan, 11am-6pm, Kinning Park Centre. \*\* **Earth First! Winter Moot** 5-6 Feb somewhere in Sussex 07837 942373 [www.eco-action.org/gathering](http://www.eco-action.org/gathering) \*\* **International Anti-G8 Meeting**, Tuebingen, Germany, 26-27 Feb. For people involved or interested in co-ordinating European resistance to the 2005 G8 Summit. For more information: [info-g82005@riseup.net](mailto:info-g82005@riseup.net) [www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/resist-g8/g8resist-tuebingen.htm](http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/resist-g8/g8resist-tuebingen.htm)

## Mothers Of Invention

In a direct action protest run entirely by locals, the carnage to make way for the Linslade bypass between Milton Keynes and Aylesbury has been stopped since last Monday. It's taken a group of 40 mothers and kids to defend the land against the combined efforts of contractors Fitzpatricks, Homegrown Timber Ltd and the police as they try to drag the digging equipment onto the site to begin work. And the destruction wouldn't just end with the road as this is one of the Government's "growth areas", with Milton Keynes set to have 44,000 new houses by 2021 and Aylesbury 15,000.

Two women have been arrested and charged with Aggravated Trespass for chaining themselves to a digger. Bailed not to go near the Bypass route, they have a preliminary court hearing on Jan 28<sup>th</sup>, and hope to use the trial to call the legality of the scheme into question.

Road Block claims there are around 200 road schemes planned countrywide, forming a roads programme to rival the Conservatives' 'Roman-style' programme of the early 1990s.

\* Urgent help is needed now - contact Victoria 07815 817108 [vharvey@btopenworld.com](mailto:vharvey@btopenworld.com)

\* For daily updates

[www.linsladeprotest.oneuk.com/bypass/bypass.html](http://www.linsladeprotest.oneuk.com/bypass/bypass.html)

\* See also [www.roadalert.org.uk](http://www.roadalert.org.uk)

[www.roadblock.org.uk](http://www.roadblock.org.uk)

## ROUGH MUSIC

Brighton's been crying out for one for a while - no, not another poxy coffee shop but an independent local newsletter that tells it how it is. '**Rough Music**' is named after the old Sussex tradition of standing outside dodgy peoples' houses and making some noise. It aims to be monthly and you can pick up copies around town. The first issue covers the teachers assistant strike, Brighton arms dealers EDO, Shoreham airport and coffee shops. If you've got any dirt you'd like to get them to dig email [roughmusic@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:roughmusic@hotmail.co.uk)

\* **South Coast Indymedia** is now online covering Kent, Sussex and Hampshire. See some saucy seaside postcards at... [www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/southcoast](http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/southcoast)

## Tim Spice(r) but Dim

Looking for a new line of work? Try working as a bodyguard in Iraq. It's a health and safety nightmare, but the money's good. Former Special Forces soldiers are queuing up for jobs that can pay more than \$100,000 a year. More than 50 private security firms are in Iraq today, with an estimated 20,000 hired guns working for them.

Now notorious mercenary Tim Spicer is in on the act. Last March Spicer's London-based company, Aegis Defense Services, bagged a \$293 million contract from the Pentagon to protect US diplomats in Iraq, and coordinate the other security firms. Five Democratic senators protested the Aegis contract on humanitarian grounds, citing Spicer's record. The army admitted they had been unaware of 'trouble spots' in Spicer's past, but refused to reconsider the contract.

Spicer is a killer-for-hire with a long record of scandal and bloodshed behind him. He was embroiled in the attempted Equatorial Guinea coup, along with hapless crook Mark Thatcher. He's been arrested for similar failed coups in Sierra Leone, and was paid \$36 million by the government of Papua New Guinea to suppress a rebellion. He failed and the government collapsed. Another day another dollar.

His former company, Sandline International, illegally supplied weapons to Sierra Leone, defying a UN arms embargo that had been affirmed as British law. And, in an earlier scandal, two soldiers in a British unit under Spicer's command shot and killed a Catholic teenager in Northern Ireland in 1992. The soldiers were subsequently convicted of murder, but Spicer has steadfastly defended them.

"Mark my words, this contract is going to come back and bite them," said Rev. Sean McManus of the Irish National Caucus, "He's a dangerous fellow. And as his record in Ireland shows... these guys don't change their spots."

Lt Col Spicer will be speaking at the School of Oriental and African Studies next Thursday (27<sup>th</sup>) 6pm about his experiences in Africa. Why not go along and ask for a job in the 'reconstruction' of Iraq? You can reserve a ticket for the meeting at [www.royalafricansociety.org/what\\_wedo/ras-meetings/private\\_securitycompanies/view](http://www.royalafricansociety.org/what_wedo/ras-meetings/private_securitycompanies/view) or telephone The Royal African Society 020 7898 4390.

## ...and finally...

Isn't it a hassle having to queue for drinks when you're out? And then trying to make yourself heard over shite house music? And then realising you've run out of money? What a wind-up. Wouldn't it be better if bars could just *implant a chip in your body*, with your account details and personal information stored on it? That way, they'd know your name as soon as you walked in the door, and the barman would serve up your favourite drink and automatically charge your account any time you walked near the bar. Wouldn't that be easier for everyone?

If you're thinking, "No, that sounds like a sinister capitalist conspiracy with terrifying civil rights implications, not to mention a good way to spunk all my cash on expensive drinks without realising it," well, you're right. But that's exactly the 'reward' that Bar Soba in Glasgow is offering its loyal customers. The VeriChip, which has a lifespan of 20 years (and can be used for 'defence and homeland security' purposes, as well as bar tabs) is already in use in bars in Spain and Holland. "It'd be great if this catches on," one chipped punter told the Observer, "you could put all your personal details and medical records on it." But, is there a free curry in it? Just give it time, mate.

## Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all patients, patience is a virtue... Honest!