

AFTER LAST MONTH'S ANALYSIS OF THE USA ELECTION CANDIDATES, MS BRINGS YOU THE CONSEQUENCES PRESIDENT OBAMA



MAY HAVE ON A SUPERPOWER NATION'S HEALTH



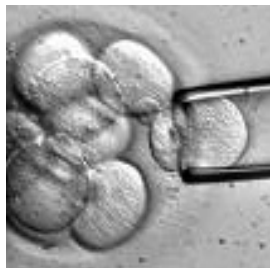
HOW much foresight should one expect, how much ideology can one accept from a president, allegedly advocating progress and innovation? Come on, Bush, do you really think vetoing the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act (SCREA) propelled science forward? Barack Obama is planning to employ his executive power as President to quickly reverse some of his predecessor's policies which have stirred up outcries and indignation on the international stage.

Obama's determination to increase funding for science and liberalising research activity marked one cornerstone of his campaign.

Since the introduction of a congressional enactment in

1996, prohibited funding of stem cell government and National Institutes of Health research, the U.S. has solely relied on state/private financing to defend its leading role in stem cell research. Bush loosened these restrictions in 2001 but vetoed the SCREA. Obama is now planning to overturn this restriction.

However, as The Wall Street Journal points out, in view of the current economic crisis, it is questionable



whether such an initiative by the next President, however swiftly implemented, will re-enliven the scientific community or encourage private investment. Although the International Society for Stem Cell Research has pressed the President-Elect to quickly overturn

the existing policy, scientists argue that change in the public sector will not become apparent in the nearby future.

Another Republican legacy era is the global gag rule, which Bush reinstated in 2001. This rule - first introduced by Reagan but overturned by Clinton - prohibits U.S. taxpayers' money to be donated to international family planning groups providing counselling and terminations of pregnancy. It

poses on healthcare providers the ultimatum of either minimising their talk about reproductive choices or risk losing U.S. funding. As a result, many developing nations have now been deprived of contraceptive supply, contributing to a rise in illegal abortions and maternal deaths.

Be it the domestic scientist or the women in Africa and Asia who are literally dying for a change, the entire world's hope and expectations are resting on Obama.

A DASH OF HOPE?



Many rumours had circulated around the question who Barack Obama would appoint as Secretary of Health and Human Services. Hillary Clinton seemed the most likely candidate but, yet again, Obama's always good for a surprise.

Tom Daschle brings 26 years of experience in Congress including 10 years as Democratic leader in the Senate, into the new job, Daschle would prefer keeping the current system of employer-based coverage whilst creating a



new system covering the uninsured. He has also proposed the creation of a "federal health board" in his recent book "Critical: What We Can Do About the Health Care Crisis", which, for instance, would determine which treatment options were to be included in coverage plans, based on evidence of effectiveness.

Originally from South Dakota, Daschle served on the governing board of the Mayo Clinic, one of the most renowned medical centres world-wide. Although he helped push Clinton's failed health care reform efforts in the 1990s, he was one of Obama's earliest supporters in the campaign.

With his reputation as a relentless opponent of George Bush's agenda, Daschle's appointment is, hence, a good enough reason to re-ignite hopes for more social justice.

US v NHS



WITH doctors' salaries exceeding any other country and their lead in research and technology, America lures over some of the world's finest medical minds. Even before Michael Moore's Sicko, however, the private sector-based U.S. system enjoyed the notorious reputation of corruptness and immorality. But what exactly is hiding behind this debate fuelling system, exemplified by the recent campaign?

While America spends more money on healthcare, it is the only developed country to lack a universal healthcare system. The majority of Americans have their healthcare needs met by health insurance, either purchased individually or through a government-assisted scheme. However, over half receive insur-

ance via their employer; Starbucks spends more money on its employees' healthcare than it does on coffee beans...

But what of the 50 million Americans who lack insurance? At least 25% are eligible for a publicly-funded healthcare programme aimed to provide for the elderly, disabled, children, and the poor; meanwhile, federal law mandates public access to emergency services, regardless of ability to pay. And yet this system has left ER departments overwhelmed: with so many uninsured Americans waiting until they hit crisis point before seeking help, even the insured may find themselves turned away from A&E. It comes as no surprise that, many Americans (politicians included) are now demanding some form of universal healthcare.

Can the NHS act as a source of inspiration for

the American Government? Michael Moore certainly thought so. But what about its practicality? Even we do not always receive the best that medical expertise has to offer. The NHS cannot afford potentially life-saving cancer drugs and if you need emergency dental treatment tomorrow, you can forget about having that covered by the NHS...

I resent having to pay a £7.10 prescription charge for a medication that according to the BNF should cost £2.48. However, I shall try to be grateful on my next visit, bearing in mind that the UK healthcare system not only has funded my medical education, but healthcare access that so many Americans can only dream of.



PRESIDENT-elect Obama has not just battled his opponents, but also a smoking habit which some feared would threaten his image and weaken the chances of electoral success. Clearly, this was not the case.

While Obama pledged to give up by the end of his campaign, he was still noted by journalists to be lighting up shortly before election night. 'I figure, seeing as I'm running for President, I need to cut myself some slack', he told the public.

Does it really matter if a politician smokes? Like many British politicians such as Boris Johnson, who admitted to 'quite a few spliffs' at university, Obama has also admitted

to dabbling in cannabis and cocaine as a trouble

teenager. Perhaps it is time to realise the importance of honesty in our leaders and forgive them their trespasses. They, like us, are only human.

Only time can tell whether Obama will carry his addiction with him to the White House. No British politician has yet been damaged by admitting to poor lifestyle choices. Let us hope the American public take the same attitude.

