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WOMEN'S TALK

The communications union

THE MAGAZINE OF THE WOMEN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE **SUMMER | AUTUMN 2010** WW.CWU.ORG



CALM BEFORE THE STORM?

Vera Kelsey looks at what impact changes to the state pension will have on women in their retirement

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EQUALITY FIGHT GOES ON

BILLY HAYES
GENERAL SECRETARY



The content of this issue demonstrates the breadth of the issues affecting millions of women. The contributions of the Cradley Heath Chainmakers and International Women's Day celebrate the successes of the women's movement and remind us the struggle for equality continues.

As I write, the coalition government's industrial and welfare policies will decimate tens of thousands of jobs in the public sector, cut welfare benefits and tax

credits and reduce family support. If implemented, these plans will disproportionately affect women's financial independence and the work/life balance that trade unions fought for and Labour enshrined in law.

The CWU will be at the forefront of campaigns against these regressive policies. Take part through your branch, and regional and National Women's Advisory Committees. Together we can win!

Cut & make up

KEVIN SLOCOMBE
HEAD OF COMMS

We're all going to feel the effects of government cuts, but women will undoubtedly find themselves at the sharp end of benefit cuts and the reduction of public services. This is one reason why it's so important to have a strong Labour Party standing up for working people and the vulnerable in society. We're pleased to be supporting Ed Balls for Labour leader and he has much to say in his column opposite. This edition of *Women's Talk* focuses on

women's pensions, an important but often overlooked issue, and we also bring news of a great campaign on ethical make-up.



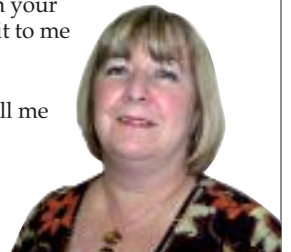
Hard day's work

ANNMARIE MCCALL
EDITOR

Welcome to the summer/autumn edition of *Women's Talk*. The Women's Advisory committee (WAC) has yet again worked hard and the three working parties have achieved a lot this year, including researching domestic abuse, the under-representation of women in the CWU, and International Women's Day.

The domestic abuse party have put together a booklet and poster (which you can see on the back cover of this magazine), and all the information is available in various forms i.e. paper or electronic versions from the equality department or the CWU website: cwu.org.

If any of the issues in the magazine have affected you, or perhaps helped you, please let us know. Should you want an article to appear in the magazine, or have a letter printed (we don't have to publish your name) simply email it to me in Word format to: annmarie.mccall@hotmail.co.uk or call me on 07925 507 365.



FAIRER SEX?

The Tory-Lib Dem's "unfair Budget" will hit women even harder than men

LABOUR LEADER NOMINEE ED BALLS ON BUDGET BUNGLES

Ed Balls, MP for Morley and Outwood, says the Tory-Lib Dem Budget promotes inequality and assaults the public services. He wants to lead the Labour Party back into the hearts and minds of the electorate and back into government



When I decided to stand for leader of the Labour Party, with the backing of the CWU, I thought about what we could achieve together, and about the effect of this Tory-Lib Dem government on people like you.

We needed a Budget that was fair, but raising VAT to 20 per cent was the most unfair tax choice the Tory-Lib Dems could have made,

penalising people every time they buy ordinary things like a kettle, a coat, or a phone.

We also needed a Budget that promoted equality, but this has achieved the opposite. As Yvette Cooper has shown, the Budget hits women even harder than men: of £8bn cuts and tax changes, a massive £6bn will be taken from women.

Driven to recession
Ignoring the excellent work of the Pensions

Commission, co-chaired by former CWU deputy leader Jeannie Drake, the Tories and Lib Dems are making women work longer before claiming a state pension, as well as cutting the additional pension for six million women by £100 a year.

They are also plotting the biggest assault on public services in living memory. Their proposal to privatise the post will threaten not just jobs but a great public

service on which the whole country relies. I urge all CWU members to fully support, as I do, the union's campaign to *Keep the Post Public*.

“These deflationary cuts could drive the country into a new recession”

These deflationary cuts repeat the mistakes of the 1930s and 1980s. They will lead to rising unemployment and could drive the country into a new recession.

Leading Labour

This is why I am standing to lead the Labour Party – to reverse the Tory-Lib Dems' unfair policies that hit women worst of all. But first, we have to take on the Tory-Lib Dem government and rebuild the Labour Party. I want to make sure we are in tune with the concerns of people like you and lead Labour back into government with jobs, equality and fairness central to everything we do.

Ed Balls will give the Tory-Lib Dems a clear sign that Labour will stand against cuts

Equality



Working miracles for baby Harvey

FUND RAISING

Carlisle CWU members have supported fundraising efforts for premature baby Harvey Kye, born 26 weeks early on September 26, 2009, weighing just 11lb 15oz.

A charity night in the family's local pub, *The Bee Hive*, brought together friends, family and supporters for a raffle and auction, with prizes donated by local businesses and organisations.

The CWU branch representing Harvey's grandad, who works at the Royal Mail sorting office, donated an iPod docking station to the raffle, and a Liverpool FC shirt – signed by the whole team – was auctioned for £500.

Harvey's parents, Amanda and Darrell, raised up to £2,500 on the night, which was organised in aid of the special care baby units at Newcastle Royal Infirmary and Carlisle Infirmary to thank them for the amazing care Harvey received. He is now doing well and is in good health.

Think globally and act locally for IWD

EVENTS

Every year on March 8 thousands of events are held throughout the world that inspire women to celebrate their achievements.

On International Women's Day (IWD) a global web of diverse local activity, ranging from political rallies, government performances, theatrical performances, fashion parades, business conferences, networking events, local women's craft

markets and more, connects women across the world.

Many global corporations are now actively supporting IWD, running their own internal events and supporting external ones, and every year IWD is increasing in status. The United States designates the whole month of March as 'Women's History Month'.

For this year's IWD, the Women's Advisory Committee and the secretaries from the

regional women's committees met at CWU headquarters, in Wimbledon, to hear guest speakers from the union, including Grace Mitchell, a telecoms national official, and Jane Loftus, CWU national president. Ruth Bresling, from feminist charity Eaves, spoke about how her organisation provides high quality housing and support to vulnerable women, and tackles all forms of violence against women, including sexual

exploitation, as well as helping women exploited in prostitution. Everyone agreed it was a great way to celebrate IWD and the event was enjoyed by all.

Why not make a difference – think globally and act locally – so everyday is International Women's Day? Do your bit to help ensure the future for young women is bright, safe, equal and rewarding.

Annamarie McCall

Come together on climate solidarity

CAMPAIGN

With women making up 85 per cent of the victims of natural disasters and 75 per

cent of refugees, climate change is one of the most important issues for women to organise around.

● Get involved in CWU's Climate Solidarity project by contacting Maeve Kennedy on mkennedy@cwu.org or 07590 245 269.



Make a date at the chainmakers centenary event

EVENTS

In 1910, the Cradley Heath Chainmakers focused the world's attention on Britain's low-paid women workers.

In their backyard forges, hundreds of Staffordshire women laid down their tools to strike for a living wage and, after 10 long weeks, won a pay rise that increased their wages from five shillings (25p) to 11 shillings (55p) per week.

In September, thousands are expected to gather at the Black Country Living Museum, in Dudley, to mark the group's pioneering struggle for respect, dignity and fair pay at 'Chainmakers 2010', and this

year's event is predicted to have the largest attendance yet because it commemorates the centenary of the

“This year's event is predicted to have the largest attendance yet because it commemorates the centenary”

women chainmakers' strike. It will feature rousing speeches by the CWU's own Billy Hayes, GMB president Mary Turner and socialist veteran Tony Benn, as well as a dramatic re-enactment of the struggle.

The highlight of the day will be the grand procession, led by women in Edwardian costume,

their ranks boosted by local supporters, their families and trade unionists from other parts of the UK.

Billed as a family day out by event organisers, other activities on offer at the museum include a children's area, a trip down a coal mine, and a trolley bus ride to an authentic period village, which has traditional shops and an old-fashioned pub.



Marching in authentic costume

Wolverhampton Amal Branch women's officer Vera Kelsey is urging as many people as possible to attend.

“Join the march, bring your banners and enjoy a great day out celebrating the centenary of these brave women – and a fight that still inspires working women today,” she said.

● For further details log on to: www.wolvstuc.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=32:wom

InBrief

Women needed

CWU branches have vacancies for women's officers across the UK. Why not get involved in your local branch and improve the working life of members in your area? Women are under-represented at all levels of union activism so help us to help women in the communications industry.

> E-mail equality officer Linda Roy for more information: lroy@cwu.org

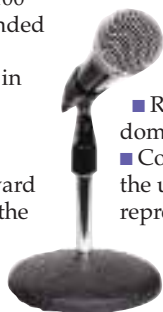
Women's Conference

CWU runs an annual Women's Conference to discuss and take policy decisions on issues affecting women. Previous conferences have tackled subjects such as assisted suicide, parental responsibility and women's representation. The next one is in February, and anyone interested in being a delegate should speak to their local branch.

Priorities set out at 12th Women's Conference

CONFERENCE

Despite the February snow, more than 100 people attended Women's Conference in Coventry, where new WAC chair Jackie Gatward chaired for the first time. National equality



officer Linda Roy welcomed everyone to the 12th motion-based conference and explained WAC priorities for the year:

- Reducing domestic violence.
- Combating the under-representation of women in trade unions.
- Promoting

International Women's Day (IWD).

The research will be available in paper and electronic forms by the end of the year.

Tony Kearns, senior deputy general secretary, explained the CWU finances and some changes that may happen, including possibly

combining the six equality conferences into a single equality conference. There was lively debate over motions and some very good humour. Motions on facility time and maintaining a strong Women's Conference were sent on to CWU annual conference. *Annamarie McCall*

FIGHT THE FAR RIGHT

The threat of the far right BNP on women should never be underestimated

THE SEXIST ATTITUDES OF THE BNP MUST NOT BE FORGOTTEN

Though its more racist policies are well known, CWU women's advisory committee member **Vera Kelsey** says we must also remember the party's history of misogyny



Most people are aware that the BNP does not peddle

normal political policies but instead promotes loathing and division.

The BNP preys on people's insecurities and stands against democratic principles of fairness, tolerance and equality.

While the party is well-known for its racial policies, its views towards women have been less prominent, and it's well-worth reminding ourselves of some of the deeply misogynistic attitudes expressed a few years

ago by its one-time London organiser and Greater London Assembly election candidate Nick Eriksen.

Back in 2005, when he was author of the far-right blog *Sir John Bull*, career women were described as both "unnatural" and "vile" by Mr Eriksen, and, in the same year, he posted the following offensive rant:

"Rape is simply sex (I am talking about 'husband-rape' here)... Women enjoy sex, so rape cannot be such a terrible physical ordeal... To suggest that rape, when conducted without violence, is a

serious crime is like suggesting force-feeding a woman chocolate cake is a heinous offence. A woman would be more inconvenienced by having her handbag snatched."

“All who believe in equality for both sexes should join the fight against the BNP”

In April 2008, after renowned investigative journalist Andrew Gilligan exposed Eriksen in the *Evening Standard* as the individual behind *Sir John Bull*, the BNP removed him as a candidate, but some in

the party objected to action being taken against him, arguing that his comments had been taken out of context.

Tackled by Mr Gilligan over the comments, Mr Eriksen claimed that he had been "raising an important issue in a provocative way to allow people to make up their own minds" and added: "It's typical of the media to distort what the BNP say".

Speaking to *Women's Talk*, CWU women's advisory committee member Vera Kelsey insisted that it was "vitaly important that we never forget such comments – just as we must never forget what Hitler's Nazis did when they took power in Germany."

She continued: "Of course the BNP moved to disassociate themselves from Mr Eriksen's comments, but that was only after he had been exposed some three years later.

"In my opinion, the BNP is not only racist, it's sexist too and all who believe in equality for both sexes, and oppose racist and sexist attitudes, should join the fight against them."

STOP THE STIGMA OF MENTAL HEALTH

[HEALTH]

National equality officer **Linda Roy** outlines the work of an innovative campaign group aiming to reduce the stigma of mental health problems and end discrimination

With one in four people affected by mental health problems, the work of organisations like Time to Change is invaluable.

I was one of more than 150 people at a breakfast reception that focused on challenging discrimination, held at the Emirates Stadium, on April 13, and organised by Time to Change – a partnership of mental health organisations such as Mind, Rethink and the Institute of Psychiatry.

“These projects are led by people with real experience of mental health issues”

Time to Change takes a whole-population, well-being approach, embracing links between mental and physical health for everyone. In its first year, the organisation's focus has been focused on campaigning, carrying out research and asking people to realise stigmatisation and discrimination happens, and it's an issue relevant to all.

For publicity, television ads busting some of the common myths about mental health problems were aired and adverts were placed in newspapers, online, in pubs and on the London Underground, featuring celebrities alongside everyday

people with mental health issues.

Online films were also made tackling head-on the powerful stereotypes that link mental health problems with violence. Roadshows in 12 locations around England spread the word about Time to Change and got people involved, and pushed mental health into the public consciousness.

The organisation also runs regular events and projects around the country, especially during its focus week in October. In October 2007, Time to Change ran community projects working with more than 28,000 people both with and without experience of mental health problems. Evaluation has shown that involvement with the project has had a significant impact on the well-being of participants after just three months of involvement. (This year, Time to get Moving Week is October 9-17, more from: www.time-to-change.org.uk/what-were-doing/get-moving).

One of the main projects is Education Not Discrimination (END), which provides anti-stigma training to professional groups that have a significant impact on the lives of people with mental health problems. Other elements of Time to Change are based on the theory that social contact is



one of the most powerful ways of challenging stigma.

Evaluation has shown student teachers taking part in END training have seen a significant positive change in knowledge and attitudes as a result, and in the way in which they behave towards people with mental health problems.

These projects are led by people with real experience of mental health issues, supporting people to challenge mental health discrimination at grassroots level.

The projects provide training, networking, mentoring opportunities and resources and give people the tools and confidence they need to challenge discrimination for themselves.

I recommend that everyone takes a closer look at this valuable campaign.

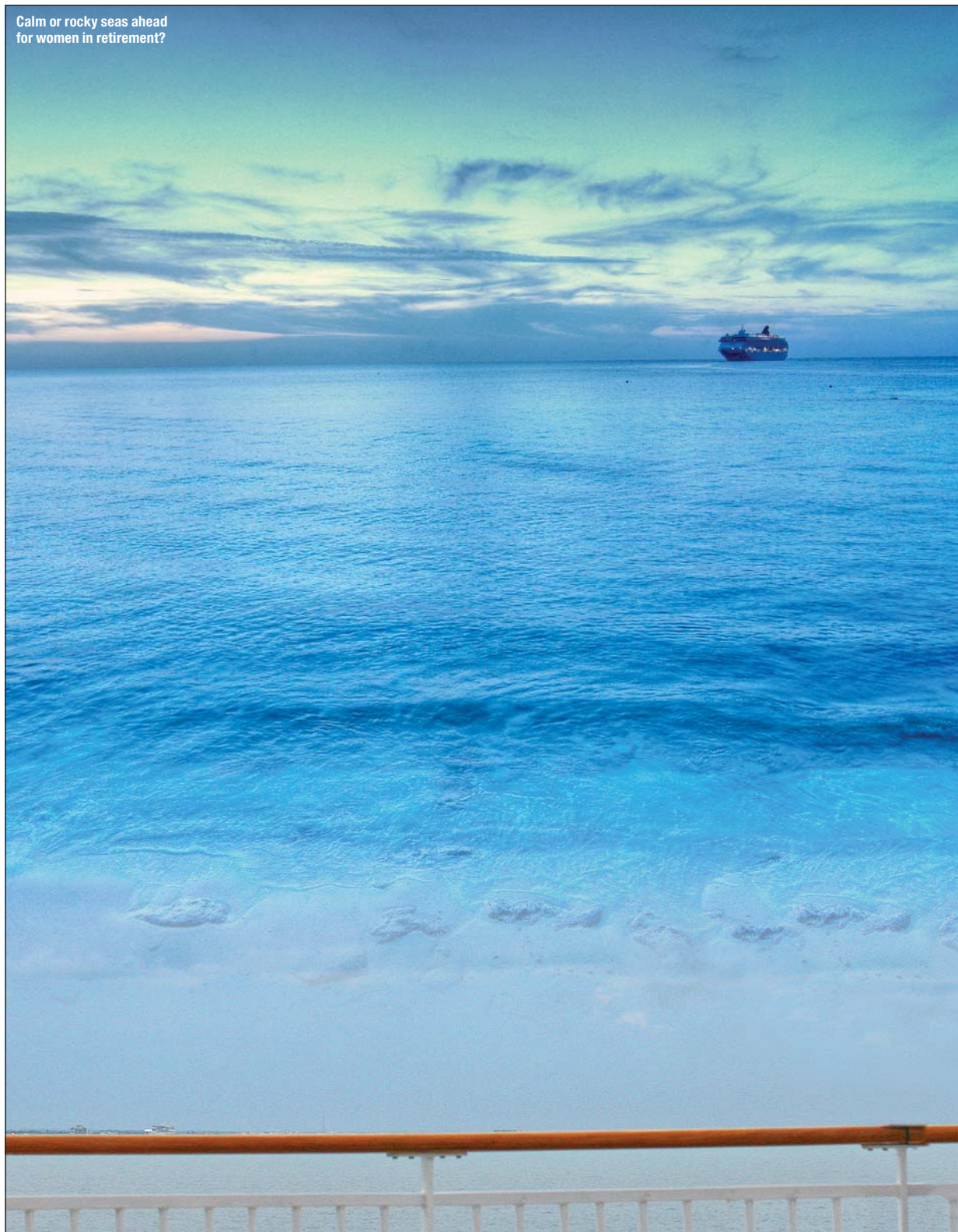
Above: Time to rethink mental health issues

Time to Change key stats:

- 18,000 + signed up to receive updates.
- 1 in 6 MPs signed an Early Day Motion supporting the aims of Time to Change.
- 27,000 took part in Get Moving events.
- 24,500+ have joined on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/timetochange.
- 34 million have seen the campaign.
- Funded by £16 million from the Big Lottery Fund and £4m from Comic Relief.

FOR MORE INFORMATION GO TO
WWW.TIME-TO-CHANGE.ORG.UK/HOME

Calm or rocky seas ahead
for women in retirement?





WOMEN BE AWARE: PENSIONS ARE CHANGING

From April, changes to state pension criteria began to take effect on the UK's female population, for whom the age of eligibility will start to rise from the current 60 to 65 between now and 2020. **Vera Kelsey**, women's officer for Wolverhampton District Amal branch, takes a look at what this means for women's future as pensioners

According to plans drawn up by the previous government, those women born on or after April 6, 1950, will receive their state pension between the age of 60 and 65, (depending on their birthdate) – however, the new coalition government may have other plans.

Currently, a woman born on May 6, 1950, will be able to retire at 60 years and two months, and a woman born on 6 May, 1951, gets to draw her state pension at 61 years and two months. This timetable will equalise the pension age for men and women at 65 by 2020, after which, further plans are for the age to rise to

66 – for both sexes – between 2024 and 2026, 67 between 2034 and 2036, and 68 between 2044 and 2046.

However, the new coalition Government is considering accelerating this, perhaps raising the age for men to 66 by 2016 and the women's retirement age to 66 in 2020 – eight and six years earlier than current plans respectively – and the state retirement age for all may now increase to as high as 70 in the future.

In addition to the retirement age rise, tens of thousands of women fall into work categories that mean they miss out on a state pension. This is because rules affecting part-timers and ►



◀ people who have a number of jobs all paid below the National Insurance limit of £97 accrue no entitlement. By increasing hours of work slightly to meet the Earnings Threshold of £110, credits would be paid towards their pensions by the state.

Positive steps

Some more positive changes to pension entitlement mean that the number of qualifying years of national insurance payments needed for women to receive the full basic state pension of £97.65 a week has reduced from 39 years to 30.

This change – along with an improved system of national insurance credits – is aimed at redressing some of the historic pension imbalances between men and women, in large part caused by childbirth and childcare taking women out of the workforce for

extended periods during their working lives.

And, from next year, the link between the state pension and average earnings will be restored and protected under a so-called “triple lock,” which means that the rise will be either in line with earnings, prices, or a 2.5 per cent increase, whichever is the greater.

All this should add up to a better deal for women in relation to the state pension in the years to come, although we will have to wait longer for it.

Inequality in retirement

Women remain Britain’s poorest pensioners. We are twice as likely to live in poverty as men and receive £124 a month less, due to incomplete years of NI contributions.

Sadly, millions of women who were ill-advised to pay a married women’s stamp

Above: Women remain Britain’s poorest pensioners

have accrued no benefit at all and now face living out the rest of their lives in poverty. This is the government equivalent of pension mis-selling and, even though women are now half the workforce in this country, they are regarded as an anomaly in the pension system.

The fight for full pensions equality needs to be waged with renewed determination. This country can afford better pensions for women, and the pressure and the campaigns need to be kept up to ensure we live out the last quarter of our lives in dignity and free from poverty.

● For details on state pension changes and information on earnings thresholds visit: www.direct.gov.uk/en/Pensionsandretirementplanning/StatePension/DG_069498. Or visit: www.hmrc.gov.uk/payee/rates-thresholds.htm

CHOOSE – BECAUSE YOU'RE WORTH IT

Want to have more confidence in your choice of cosmetics? **Jean Sharrocks** checks out the Women's Environmental Network's Careful Beauty checklist

Women's Environmental Network (WEN) is running a Careful Beauty campaign to give consumers the information they need to choose cosmetics they can trust.

The campaign has an online checklist, showing which beauty products to avoid and which have potentially harmful ingredients. With 22 companies checked against 20 health, environmental and ethical criteria, it gives consumers the confidence to choose a good product range.

"While beauty products are designed to make us look and feel better about ourselves the majority of modern cosmetics are complex mixtures of industrially produced synthetic chemicals," says Lauren Benton, Health Officer at WEN, which works to tackle areas concerning women and the environment that no other organisation is addressing. "The problem is that some of these chemicals are bio-accumulative. This means that small amounts, absorbed when we wash our hair, paint our nails or spray on deodorant, don't go away but gradually build-up, creating a chemical cocktail in our bodies. To prevent this we need to choose products that do not contain these potentially harmful ingredients."

Some of the most commonly

used preservatives – parabens – are oestrogen mimics, implicated in a number of health issues including breast cancer. Synthetic fragrance or 'parfum' can contain more than 100 chemicals and may indicate the presence of phthalates, which are linked to reproductive damage and have been banned from use in the manufacture of toys.

Only those companies who do not use parabens or parfum in ANY of their products are included in the Careful Beauty checklist on WEN's website:

www.wen.org.uk/your-wen/careful-beauty/

Awareness of the potentially harmful ingredients in everyday cosmetics and toiletries is growing, and we need to have confidence in what we are putting on our skin, and, more importantly, our babies' skin. But, even if we do know that certain ingredients are to be avoided, it can be difficult to remember the names and read the tiny print on the packaging.

"WEN's Careful Beauty online checklist is just what women are looking for," says Clare Dimmer of Breast Cancer UK. "Because of links between the hazardous chemicals found in our everyday products and breast cancer, women want to know where they can find safer alternatives."



Know what's in your moisturiser?

Some of the chemicals lurking in cosmetics:

- **Parfum:** used in fragrances and the most frequent cause of allergies.
- **Phthalates:** synthetic chemicals linked to reproductive damage.
- **Triclosan:** used in toothpaste and soap, which can kill beneficial bacteria and encourage 'superbugs'.
- **AHAs (Alpha-hydroxy acids):** used in exfoliants and moisturisers, with up to 10,000 reports of adverse reactions.

Find out more from WEN, or become a member by emailing: membership@wen.org.uk. WEN's Fruity Beauty workshop allows you to make your own skincare products. Call on 020 7481 9004 for more information.

[MORE INFORMATION ON]
WWW.WEN.ORG.UK

100
number of
chemicals found
in the average
synthetic
fragrance



BE BREAST AWARE

Women's Talk editor
Annamarie McCall on
recognising breast
cancer symptoms

In the UK, breast cancer is the most common type of cancer among women. More than 45,500 cases are diagnosed every year, usually in women over 50 who have reached menopause (although, it is possible for women of any age to get breast cancer and, in rare cases, it can affect men).

The first symptom of breast cancer for many women is a lump in their breast. But nine out of 10 breast lumps are benign, which means they are not cancers.

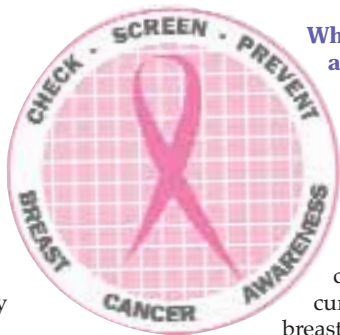
“Being breast aware simply means getting to know how your breasts normally look and feel at different times of the month”

If you spot a lump, or see any changes you should contact your doctor straight away.

Watch out for

Changes that could be due to breast cancer are:

- A lump or thickening in an area of the breast.
- A change in the size or shape of a breast.
- Dimpling of the skin.
- A change in the shape of your nipple, particularly if it turns in, sinks into the breast or becomes irregular in shape.
- A blood-stained discharge from the nipple.
- A rash on a nipple or surrounding area.
- A swelling.



Why be breast aware?

The earlier a diagnosis, the more likely it is to be treated and the better the chance of a cure. Being breast aware simply means getting to know how your breasts normally look and feel at different times of the month. If you notice a change that isn't normal for you, talk it over with your doctor.

What to look for

You don't need to examine your breasts every day or even every week. Some women have lumpier breasts at the time of a period. If the lumpiness comes and goes with your menstrual cycle, it is nothing to worry about.

It is easiest to check your breasts in the shower or bath. Run a soapy hand over each breast and up under your arm. The NHS breast awareness five-point code says:

- Get to know what is normal for your body.
- Look and feel regularly.
- Know the signs to look for.
- Report any changes to your doctor immediately.
- Attend your doctors for breast screening if you are aged 50 or over.

Remember, you are looking for changes to the size, shape or feel of your breast.

● Information for this article came from Cancer Research UK at: www.cancerresearchuk.org and Breast Cancer Care at: www.breastcancercare.org.uk. You can also call the free Breast Cancer Care helpline on 0808 800 6000.

The EMPLOY Charter

Working rights for those with cancer

Employer-employee dialogue

An employee with breast cancer should have the opportunity (but not the obligation) to have regular meetings with their employer to discuss the impact of their diagnosis on employment. Meetings should include discussion around reasonable work adjustments, time off needed, arrangements for transfer/effective management of the employee's work during sickness absence, phased return to work after time off and the possibility of flexible working.

Money matters

The employer should provide clear information on financial entitlements including company and statutory sick pay and other relevant company benefits.

Prejudice-free workplace

All employees affected by breast cancer have the right to work in a sympathetic environment, free from prejudice. An employee's privacy should be respected.

Listening to the individual's experience

Everyone's experience of breast cancer is different and the medical treatments required will vary. An employer should take the time to listen to and understand and accommodate the individual employee's needs where possible and reasonable.

Time off work

An employee with breast cancer should not have to use annual leave for medical appointments, treatment and recovery from treatment, including breast reconstruction surgery. An employee should be able to attend prosthesis fittings and other necessary services through flexible working arrangements.

Your responsibilities under disability discrimination law

People with cancer are covered by the Disability Discrimination Act. Their employer is required to make reasonable adjustments to help them at work. An employee should not be treated less favourably than colleagues because of their breast cancer or for a reason relating to their breast cancer, nor should they be subjected to harassment.

This information is intended solely to provide an overview. Always seek professional legal advice in relation to any specific situation.

WHO DECIDES WHEN WE DIE?

Following the backpage debate in the current issue of members' magazine *Voice*, *Women's Talk's* **Pauline Granstan** takes a further look at some of the arguments surrounding euthanasia – from a woman's perspective – and highlights a particularly harrowing case

Frances Inglis, a devoted mother and pillar of her community, was given a life sentence in January for killing her 22-year-old son with a heroin injection.

Thomas Inglis had suffered severe brain injuries in 2007 as a result of an accident, but reports from a consultant suggested the prognosis for Thomas was an encouraging one. Why then did Frances Inglis take the life of her son?

Mrs Inglis told the court she had visited her son twice a day and had seen firsthand his pain, suffering and his inability to do anything for himself.

Giving evidence she said: "All I saw was horror, pain and tragedy."

The mother of three gave her brain-damaged son a fatal injection of heroin in November 2008 after blocking the door to his room with an oxygen cylinder and allegedly holding him in her arms while he died.

Mrs Inglis denied murdering her son, despite

100

Number of Britons who have had assisted suicides at Swiss Clinic Dignitas

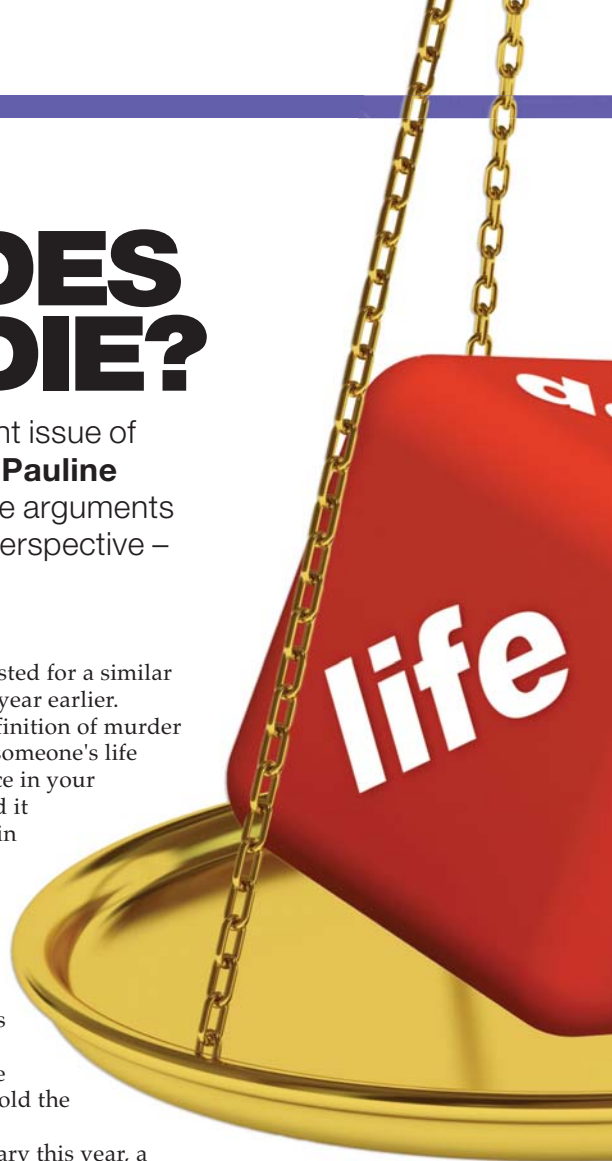
being arrested for a similar attempt a year earlier.

"The definition of murder is to take someone's life with malice in your heart. I did it with love in my heart, for Tom, so I don't see it as murder. I knew what I was doing was against the law," she told the court.

In January this year, a jury at the Old Bailey found Ms Inglis guilty of murder, and gave her a nine-year recommended minimum tariff. Passing sentence, Judge Brian Barker said:

"What you did was to take upon yourself what you thought your son's wishes would have been, to relieve him from what you described as a living hell."

He continued: "But you cannot take the law into your own hands and you cannot take away life, however compelling you think the reason."



Union debate

CWU decided at conference this year to actively debate the issue of assisted suicide amongst members and seek a policy position.

Mrs Inglis's case provides an interesting example of the core issues surrounding assisted suicide, unlawful killing and the definition of 'mercy killings'.

In both mercy killings and assisted suicide, it is frequently claimed that it is done out of love for the sufferer. Nevertheless, some find it more reasonable to



“How does one define “mercy” and when does it become a crime punishable by a life sentence in prison? Are those being helped to die able to exercise individual judgement? The debate continues”

think of a rationale behind assisted suicide, while others sometimes take a moral stance on euthanasia.

Readers may have seen reports about the Swiss clinic Dignitas, where more than 100 Britons have been helped with assisted suicides and several hundred more are on the waiting list.

The focus on many of the cases taken to Dignitas is whether those being helped to die had been able to exercise individual judgement without being unduly influenced by others.

But the same is not always true for mercy killings, because they can be done with or without the victims' knowledge or consent.

For and against

What is certain is that the arguments about mercy killing and assisted suicide will continue as there are many proponents as well as opponents.

Some medical professionals cite cases of the mentally ill who, when severely depressed, want to end their life. However, on being treated successfully for their depression, they go on to enjoy a productive life.

Above: Life and death hangs in the balance for many people who would like an assisted suicide

Others have taken a different view and believe that, in some cases, ending the life of the sufferer may be the best way forward.

Is this a merciful course?

How does one define “mercy” and when does it become a crime punishable by a life sentence in prison? Are those being helped to die able to exercise individual judgement? Are women disproportionately sentenced for such crimes? The debate continues.

**Women's Talk is not written by medical professionals and we are not qualified to give medical advice on the matter.*

Don't hide Abuse

get help not flowers



Womens' Advisory Committee working for you on Domestic Violence

HELPLINES

(mostly freephone & 24 hours)

English National Domestic Violence:
0808 2000 247

Northern Ireland Women's Aid:
0800 917 1414 (24 hours)

Scottish Domestic Abuse:
0800 027 1234

Wales Domestic Abuse:
0808 80 10 800

Male Advice & Enquiry:
0808 801 0327

Dyn Wales/Dyn Cymru:
0808 801 0321

Forced Marriages Unit:
0207 088 0151

Respect
(for domestic violence perpetrators):
0845 122 8609

Broken Rainbow (for lesbian, gay,
bi-sexual, transgender victims):
0300 999 5428
Mon 2pm-8pm
Wed 10am-1pm
Thur 2pm-8pm

Women's Aid is a national charity working to end
domestic violence against women and children:
www.womensaid.org.uk

Refuge provides emergency accommodation
in safe houses for women and children for
when they are most in need: <http://refuge.org.uk>

Manchester based DAWES Project (Domestic
Abuse: Women's Employment Support) can give
specific employment-related advice: **0161 636
7525** Mon-Fri 10am-4pm or email: [contact@
dawesproject.org.uk](mailto:contact@dawesproject.org.uk)