

## US court ruling could end positive discrimination

Karen Hebert *Bristol*

A US Supreme Court ruling is awaited, which may stop any consideration of race in medical school admissions.

The ruling could change future American university admissions procedures, by banning the use of affirmative action by universities, including medical schools, in decisions about admissions.

Cases were brought against the University of Michigan by Barbara Grutter and Jennifer Gratz. Grutter is a white female whose law school application was rejected. Gratz and Patrick Hamacher, both

white, are suing the university because, they claim, their applications were rejected as a result of their race.

The university's argument is that diversity is a compelling interest in education. They also argue that the use of racial preference is fair because they are attempting to put right discrimination that has happened in the past.

The American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC) along with a long list of organisations (which include the American Medical Student Association and the American Association of Fam-

ily Physicians) are supporting the University of Michigan in court.

Jordan Cohen, president of the Association of American Medical Colleges said in the American Medical Association News, "It will be a disaster if there is a judgment that totally eliminates race-conscious decision making."

The AAMC is adamant that race preference should be protected in medical school admissions. Ethnic minorities are underrepresented in medical schools across the board. Their viewpoint is that doctors who are of an ethnic minority tend to practice medicine more commonly in poorer, deprived areas than the other doctors. They also say that ethnic minority patients tend to respond better to and

trust an ethnic minority doctor.

A 1978 case of the University of California versus Bakke was ground breaking. Allan Bakke, a white man, had applied twice to the University of California's medical school at Davis.

Despite higher than average test scores he was rejected both times. The Supreme Court found that the university's programme was unconstitutional because it involved a quota. The court decided it was lawful to take race into account in admissions so long as no quotas were involved.

Bakke consequently won his place at the medical school, and the case is being cited by the University of Michigan in their defence. The ruling is expected by 1 July.

## Controversy grows over India's genetically modified potato

Ganapati Mudur *New Delhi*

A genetically modified potato developed in India to contain extra protein is under attack, with opponents claiming that it will result in the neglect of traditional sources of protein and thus exacerbate protein deficiency.

A senior Indian biotechnology official said last week that the potato, which has undergone nearly three years of field trials, could be approved for commercial cultivation before the end of this year.

Dr Manju Sharma, India's biotechnology secretary, said that the results of the field trial results were very encouraging and that the government would like to use the potato to reduce protein deficiency.

The potato, which was developed by scientists at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, expresses 40% more protein than wild or cultivated potatoes. The potato has been engineered with a gene, AmA1, from the amaranth plant, a

grain that has been consumed for centuries in central America and Asia.

The potato is the most widely consumed non-cereal food crop in the world, but it contains low levels of essential amino acids such as lysine, methionine, cysteine, and tryptophan. The AmA1 protein is non-allergenic and rich in essential amino acids. "Its amino acid composition is superior to that recommended by the World Health Organization as optimal for human nutrition," said biologist Dr Asis Datta, head of the team that developed the transgenic potato.

But activists say the potato will have little impact on human health because the absolute increase in protein is not significant. The protein content of wild potatoes is much less than 2% of their weight. An increase of even 40% would raise it to a maximum of 2.8%.

"This incremental increase in protein content will not lead to any significant impact on health," said Dr Devinder Sharma, director of the Forum for Biotechnology and Food Security, New Delhi.

India has not so far approved any genetically modified food. Earlier this year the government rejected several thousand tonnes of genetically modified soya blend from the United States.

## US investigates 82 cases of monkeypox virus

Fred Charatan *Florida*

Laboratory tests have confirmed an outbreak of monkeypox virus in the United States. Monkeypox is a rare viral disease that is allied to smallpox but is less lethal. It occurs mostly in central and western Africa and is called monkeypox because it was first found in 1958 in laboratory monkeys.

Early in June at least 20 cases from three midwestern states were reported to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Within two weeks 82 cases were under investigation in five states. No deaths have been reported.

The source of the current outbreak may be an exotic pet dealer in suburban Chicago who housed prairie dogs with a Gambian giant rat thought to be the primary source of infection. Prairie dogs are popular as exotic pets and sold mainly in the midwestern states.

Two of the cases reported in Wisconsin were Steve and Tammy Kautzer from Dorchester, who are pictured below with their daughter Schyan and their prairie dog Chuckles. Information on the outbreak is at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)



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