



Virtue has never been as respectable as money.

In the Congressional arena of Medicare reform, who brings the most gold in their PAC? Not the senior citizens' lobby, but doctors and health insurers. From July '85 to June '95, the AMA spent \$13.7 million, and in second place among doctors is the American Academy of Ophthalmology with \$3.63 million. Considering what HCFA has done to ophthalmologists in the past 10 years, one might ask if eye surgeons got their moneys worth.

"DNR" Means—Do not Respect! Whatever plan one makes there is a hidden difficulty somewhere.

An 80-year-old man had his doctor write on his chart that he did not want extraordinary life-saving measures. When his heart slipped into a potentially fatal rhythm, a nurse revived him with a defibrillator. He suffered a paralytic stroke and remained incapacitated for two years before his death. His family sued the hospital to recover the \$100,000 expense incurred in the two months of hospitalization after the stroke. The medical bills consumed all but \$15,000 of his net worth before he qualified for Medicare and Medicaid. The state's highest court ruled 4-3 to over turn a lower court's ruling against the hospital, as the Chief Justice said "not every wrong is deserving of a legal remedy." A dissenting justice stated, "He did not wish to be subjected to certain medical treatment. Nevertheless, his instructions were not followed." As the family's attorney said, "the right to refuse is a joke."

Every organization has an allotted number of positions to be filled by misfits. Once a misfit leaves, another will be recruited.

Like the legendary rodents deserting the floundering vessel, President Clinton's cabinet members are departing for greener (safer?) pastures. Latest to depart is David A. Kessler, MD, Commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration. A President Bush appointee, Kessler stayed on under Clinton and has been a strong advocate for tobacco control. Before he arrived, the FDA was under a cloud for being ponderously slow in drug-approval, and was alleged to have accepted drug industry payoffs. Kessler cleaned up the image, established MEDWatch, a program for reporting adverse events involving previously approved drugs and devices, and shortened approval times for new drugs for life-threatening conditions. His high profile drew criticism as well as praise, and some claim he is a political opportunist who used the agency to further his own goals. On balance, he has been a worthy public servant in an administration not noted for honesty and integrity.

Left to themselves, all things go from bad to worse.

Does a telephone conversation create a doctor-patient relationship even if no bill is charged? Yes, free treatment is still treatment, as when a dentist and social friend, called an internist complaining of back pain, difficulty breathing and sweating. The internist instructed the patient to come to his office or the hospital immediately. The dentist continued to see patients for several hours, then went to the doctor's office where he went into cardiac arrest, and subsequently died. The family sued the doctor, but the appellate court ruled that since the patient had failed to follow the doctor's instructions, a doctor-patient relationship had not been established.

Read the newspaper avidly. It is our abiding form of continuous fiction.

In September 1994, Heather Whitestone was chosen Miss America, the first ever with a disability, loss of hearing. The Atlanta Constitution printed a story in the front section stating, "At age 18 months, she almost died from a adverse reaction to a routine DPT vaccination." The following day the New York Times ran an Associated Press story, "Miss Whitestone lost her hearing at 18 months because of an adverse reaction to a diphtheria-tetanus shot." But a week later, the New York Times ran a different story relating that Miss America's deafness in fact resulted from a Hemophilus influenza type B meningitis, an infection which can now be prevented by vaccination. The question is, why can't the media get it right instead of rushing for the sensational? Obviously, the effect on public health can be enormous with a scare headline about vaccination. In fact, a correction story is rarely startling, and it is usually found in section B, page 12, near the bottom of the page. Journalists have a duty to report what is accurate, but hey, why not grab a headline and do an investigation later? Malnewsance? Disnewsia? Malreportage? Whatever—they should be held accountable.

The death of junk science—and the death of medical prostitutes.

In Portland, Oregon, a US District Judge gathered a panel of experts for advice, to evaluate claims for injuries due to silicone breast implants. He barred testimony of plaintiffs' experts, and instead relied upon the panel, which stated that there is insufficient scientific evidence to prove the implants cause disease. It marks the scientific evidence to prove the implants cause disease. It marks the first time a judge has made a ruling based upon a panel of scientific experts he gathered for advice. Several other judges are impaneling similar groups. What this means is that the unscrupulous medical-legal "whores" may be forced to make an honest living instead of peddling their concocted testimony to the highest bidder.

Yes, Virginia, There is a CD-ROM.

In the days before cyberspace, children wrote letters to Santa Claus, and while they often were effective, Santa did not answer the letters. Now, thanks to World Wide Web, a chat room was set up by a Texas software maker. Kids go directly to the digital North Pole with questions like "Hoe old are you, dude?" and "I've been good. Can you give me \$1,000,000?" A 15-year-old girl wanted a nice boyfriend, and Santa replied, "I can't actually bring you a boy, that would be kidnapping. We used to do that in the 12th century, but we got in trouble." Yet, some of us can recall when sigh-brr-space was body parts away from the fire, and whatever happened to the one-horse open sleigh?

Addenda

- ❖ Percentage of women in their 20s who live with their parents, 35%, male counterparts who do, 45%.
- ❖ The difference between a tax collector and taxidermist—the taxidermist leaves the hide.

Aloha, and keep the faith.....rts