Bureaucracy defends the status quo long past the time when the quo has lost its status.

In the discussion surrounding the cost of doing business in Hawaii, often overlooked is the added premium to your malpractice insurance provided by the state legislature. Not only is your carrier required to pay 4.165% gross excise tax, but in addition 3.75% for the Hawaii Hurricane Relief Fund. This state surcharge on your malpractice premium amounts to 7.915% compared with an average of 2.89% in other western states. Malpractice premium for hurricane coverage! Lucky (?) you live Hawaii.

Nothing that well meaning people might do should surprise us.

Not only is latanoprost good for glaucoma, and not only will it sometimes darken pale irides, but now it has been claimed to stimulate eyelash growth. So far, it is an observation, and not a controlled study, but Seattle eye surgeon Murray Johnstone claims that 30 of his glaucoma patients are developing longer, thicker eyelashes. Supposedly, the new look is “quite striking” and the doctor has alertly applied for a patent to use the drug to stimulate hair growth. The pharmaceutical company has made no comment on the report.

Confusion not only reigns, it pours.

A study published in the New England Journal of Medicine, suggested that Medicare patients use health maintenance organization (HMOs) as a revolving door. When they are healthy, they sign with an HMO. Then they leave the managed care plan when a medical problem is pending. Those who leave the HMO have about 50% more admissions to the hospital within 90 days, compared with patients who have remained in a conventional Medicare program. The results suggest that HMOs are being overpaid by the Medicare program, and of course, the study has been challenged by the managed care industry.

We are with the government and we are here to help.

Attention Hilo docs: a medical education center will be built in Hilo using $10.75 million in federal loans and loan guarantees. Senator Daniel Inouye made the announcement, that plans are for a two-story, 18,000 square foot building to be located across from Hilo Hospital. The building will house a Family Practice Clinic, which will provide training for doctors and nursing students, a cancer treatment and research center, and fiber optic links to Tripler Army Medical Center’s telemedicine facilities. The loans and loan guarantees will be through the Rural Development Agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Whatever the conversation, they are talking about money.

Premarin is the number one prescription drug in America today. Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories, a division of American Home Products, generates almost $1 billion annually from this pharmaceutical alone. Several plant-based alternatives to Premarin were in production or on the market in Canada and the U.S. until 1991. Then Wyeth-Ayerst alleged that the generics did not mimic Premarin adequately, and the Food and Drug Administration pulled the generics off the market. Two companies, Duramed Pharmaceuticals and Barr Laboratories, stuck out the process and finally met all the FDA criteria. Clearing the last hurdle, the companies naively anticipated FDA approval, and that science would prevail. But now, enter the politicians. Wyeth-Ayerst and parent company American Home Products, launched a pressure attack urging Senators Boxer, Bradley, Snowe, Mikulski and Murray to write letters to the FDA to halt the generic drug’s progress. American Home CEO John Stafford attended a White House coffee, and shortly thereafter dropped $50,000 on the Democratic National Committee. The FDA decided that it must re-examine new evidence, which had actually been examined and dismissed twice in the past. The generics were hung out to dry. But an internal FDA memo laid waste to Wyeth-Ayerst claims, and observed that the agency’s decision on these matters could have the effect not only of impeding generic substitution, but also of reducing the incentive to develop necessary public health information. Moreover, the inspector-general of the Dept. of HHS, chimed in with a report that provides even more questions about the FDA’s laggard management of the petition and lack of documentation to support Wyeth-Ayerst. For purchasers of the drug, such as Medicare, it could mean savings of $300 million per year.

Careful men. They charge when threatened.

Dr J. Trevor Woodhams’ reported that the Food and Drug Administration enforcement officers entered his office, and “arrested” a black-box laser. The FDA sources confirmed the doctor’s report and claimed the action was taken against the device. This is the first action directed against an unapproved excimer laser owned by an individual ophthalmologist. It was stated that Dr. Woodhams was performing laser in situ keratomileusis (LASIK) at the rate of about 10 cases per week. Of note is that Dr Woodhams practice serves the same area as the Emory Vision Correction Center where LASIK is performed under an FDA investigational exemption. An FDA officer said it was just a “coincidence” that this first blackbox arrest was made in Atlanta.

It is becoming hard to die, because the details of living get in the way.

“The asserted ‘right’ to assistance in committing suicide is not a fundamental liberty interest protected by the Due Process Clause.” So wrote Chief Justice of the United States, William Rehnquist, in the unanimous decision of the Supreme Court. Most major medical groups, including the American Medical Association, generally applauded. However, Justice Rehnquist, whose wife died of ovarian cancer after a protracted battle, conceded that the ruling doesn’t foreclose the possibility that dying patients will be granted additional rights in the future. Additionally, several justices in concurring opinions, added that physicians can take aggressive steps—such as providing more and more potent drugs to relieve terminal patient’s pain, even if that treatment accelerates death.

Any frontal attack on ignorance is bound to fail.

The U.S. Air Force held a press conference to announce the “final word” about the space alien episode allegedly seen in the desert near Roswell, New Mexico, 50 years ago. The “bodies” seen were actually anthropomorphic dummies used to test parachutes. Scientists and astronomers are laughing at the American Home Products, generating a surprising percentage of people still believe that the earth is the center of the universe, the Roswell UFO sightings will live on. Meanwhile, the Chamber of Commerce in Roswell hosted a 50th anniversary fair with visits to the crash site, exhibits and talks at the International UFO Museum and Research Center, and an alien costume contest.

Addenda—

❖ A prion, a protein smaller than a virus, causes the fatal illness Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease and can cause an infection without an inflammatory response.

❖ Although the banana plant may look like a tree, it is actually considered a very large herb.

❖ The average American eats the equivalent of 28 pigs in his lifetime.

Aloha and keep the faith—rts