



You Must Have Taken Great Pains, Sir: You Could Not Naturally Have Been So Stupid.

George Lundberg, MD, was editor-in-chief of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) for 17 years. Never shy of introducing politics into the JAMA, in the past the editor ran articles on physician assisted suicide, abortion, and even euthanasia. With the latest issue, Dr. Lundberg went over the edge. He chose the middle of the Congressional impeachment hearing of William Jefferson Clinton, 41st President of the United States, to publish an eight year old Kinsey Institute study on the definition of sex. The "research" was conducted at a mid-western state university, and consisted of questions centering around the definition of "did you have sex when...." The questions varied from tongue kissing, breast caressing, on through sexual intercourse, fellatio, cunnilingus, and anal penetration. Interestingly, the study showed that our President thinks much like a college student of 1991, where only about half believe that fellatio is "having sex." E. Ratcliffe Anderson, MD (call him Andy, not Ratty) executive vice-president of the AMA, read the article and promptly told Dr. Lundberg to clean out his desk. To publish this dated study at this time in our nation's history and political climate is pure politics, and no place for the AMA.

Experience Shows That HMOs Don't Learn From Their Own Experience.

Medical giant Aetna and the entire managed care industry were rocked to their foundations by the January 20, 1999, verdict of \$116 million in punitive damages brought by a jury in California. Teresa Goodrich, widow of a former deputy district attorney who died at age 44 from a rare form of stomach cancer, brought the complaint for failure to provide experimental treatment. The punitive loss followed a \$4.5 million damage verdict in the same case, and represents a resounding censure of bottom-line corporate medicine instead of providing patient care. Jurors were incensed over the three year delay Aetna took in acting on the case, and also the health plan handbook - "Nowhere in 20 pages was there a single mention of experimental treatment, yet all the denials were based on that." This event echoes the 1993 case in California where a jury ordered Health Net to pay \$89 million in damages for failure to cover experimental bone marrow transplant for a woman who had breast cancer. The lesson is obvious and simple. HMOs do not need legislative protection, they should merely allow their own doctors to practice quality medical care.

Honesty is the Best Policy, But There Are Too Few Policy Holders.

Talk about your creative billing, and why medicine gets a black eye! Peter J. Embriano, MD shined a light in patient's eyes and told them he was doing laser surgery. He billed for 37 trabeculoplasties, 63 iridotomies/iridectomies, and 12 photocoagulations, when in fact, he did not even have the necessary instruments to perform the procedures in his offices. He billed for at least 751 endothelial cell counts that were neither necessary nor performed, and received payment of almost \$54,000. He has been banned from all Medicare, Medicaid and federal health plans for five years and has surrendered his medical license. If he is sent to jail, there is no opportunity for parole.

It's Not Necessary To Buy Politicians - It's Cheaper To Rent Them.

Dentists, teachers, airline pilots, CPAs, United Postal Workers, employees of Federal Express, machinists, and even carpenters all gave more in 1998 for political action than ophthalmologists. Wake up, gentlemen and ladies, because the oil of legislation is dollars. Dollars must be spent on politicians to carry their favor, to help them get elected, and to obtain access. At a miserly average of \$60/member for 1998, Academy members should be ashamed of their participation in the American Academy of Ophthalmology's political arm OPTH-PAC. Eye surgeons reap more than half of their annual income from the federal government, so this apathetic behavior is difficult to comprehend. You and I may abhor the process and resent the expenditure, but to believe that we can stand above such tawdry means is to see the airplane taxi away from the gate, or to smell the exhaust from the bus, or more

precisely, to surrender your territory and your future to pretenders. For your own sake, support your local and your national PAC!

Creative Semantics Is The Key To Contemporary Government.

Almost surely you did not know that Medicare and Medicaid payments are made every year to "religious non-medical health care institutions." This weird reimbursement provision was built into the law in 1965 with the inception of Medicare in order to allow Christian Science facilities to be paid for custodial care of patients while they undergo spiritual treatment. The church argument that was accepted at that time was that its members would be forced to pay taxes for services their religious beliefs forbid them to use. This goofy mixture of church and state has been challenged by a group critical of faith healing, Children's Healthcare Is A Legal Duty (CHILD), and the case was won. It is now on appeal, and the AMA has provided a friend-of-the-court brief underscoring the difference between faith healing and medicine. The brief cites a study from the journal Pediatrics which looked at 172 cases of children between the years 1975 and 1995 who died without medical treatment because of religious beliefs. The study showed that 140 had at least a 90% chance of survival with appropriate medical care. Let us hope that the court recognizes the separation of church and state which Congress has failed to do for 34 years.

The Ku Klux Klan Has Not Produced Any Really Great Composers.

Another strange law suit is heading for adjudication in New York where 20 plus American hand gun makers are being sued. The seven plaintiffs claim that gun makers flood Southern states that have lenient gun laws and the excess flows north to states with stiffer laws like New York. They seek damages of \$2 million each. If the plaintiffs win it appears likely that similar suits will spring up as agencies around the country seek to tap into deep pockets of the manufacturers similar to the attack on the tobacco industry.

Usually When You Hear The Word Bipartisan, Something Ugly Is Coming.

An unique and logical plan is currently generating with a bipartisan commission on the future of Medicare. Under the proposed plan, the government would largely step aside and the benefit program would be patterned like the health benefits program available to federal workers. It would actually let Medicare patients decide their own medical destinies. With this plan the government would provide a fixed monetary benefit which Medicare recipients could use to purchase traditional Medicare coverage or pay a monthly premium of any one of a number of competing private-sector health plans. In summary, the plan would permit seniors to purchase the kind of medical care they want — co-payment in an indemnity plan, HMO, PPO, or whatever. It probably won't fly — Congress historically eschews allowing people to choose for themselves.

Heavens To PMS — Barbie Is Having A Mid-life Crisis.

Barbie doll products account for a third of Mattel's revenue, and Barbie sales fell off by 14% (only \$1.9 billion in 1998). What do you do when your 40 year old breadwinner (full name Barbara Millicent Roberts) who has had over 75 careers, ranging from rock star to astronaut, is losing her edge? Last year she had breast reduction and hip widening surgery, but that didn't prove enough. Now Mattel has embarked on a new line of hip "generation girls" including a Butterfly Art Barbie with a butterfly tattoo on her tummy and a nose ring.

Addenda

❖ The Hawaii Medical Association finished 1998 \$50,000 in the black. Thank you, Finance Committee and treasurer Chuck Kelley MD.

❖ Environmentalists have renamed jungles into rain forests, and swamps into wetlands. After all, who is going to contribute to save jungles and swamps?

❖ It is said that Domino's Pizza wagons have killed 20 people -- and that's not even counting the ones who ate the pizza.

Aloha and keep the faith — rts ■