Our Legislators Don't Know the Meaning of the Word Fear - But Then, There are Many Words They Don't Know the Meaning of.

Laser pointers and hazardous toys have been given priority attention with warnings from the American Academy of Ophthalmology, raising the issue to national prominence. But none of that approaches the hazards to people in Hawaii with our unlimited fireworks holidays. There can be no doubt that the year 2000 will be greeted with a display of noise, fire, rockets and sulfurous fumes such as never before seen here. While the Legislature dawdles and diddles with temporizing measures, and postures about religious practices, it is apparent that there will be no change in the law unless Washington Place is ignited by a stray rocket. It's a cruel world out there.

Charity was Once a Virtue; Now It's an Industry.

Historically, for all of Y1.9K (this century in current jargon) many hospitals have enjoyed nonprofit status and have been exempt from taxes on property, income and gifts. In the current climate, questions are arising about how much and how deserved such tax advantages are. In 1995 alone, the aggregate value of exemptions (reserves) to nonprofit hospitals was $4.5 billion in income taxes and $1.7 billion in property taxes. In order to show that the tax advantage is appropriate and properly administered they should demonstrate that they are turning any surplus funds back into community actions that are not profitable, such as teaching or charity programs.

1200 Drop in Membership in 1999 - What's Ahead, Jack?

While we fuss and struggle to trim expenses in order to keep the HMA budget intact, consider the troubles of the California Medical Association. Jack Lewin, M.D., CMA CEO (we all remember him) is trying to make up for the loss of 1200 members this past year. Efforts were made to reduce the CMA House of Delegates which number 439 (slightly more than the AMA House!) by about one-third, and reduce the board of trustees from 45 to 23 (the AMA makes do with 16). Both measures were resoundingly defeated at the meeting of the House of Delegates. Nothing is so painful as change when it doesn’t happen.

In Law, Nothing is Certain but the Expense.

In California, the MICRA law, passed in 1975, which limits jury awards for pain and suffering to $250,000, has long been the gold standard for those seeking reform in medical liability. Without doubt the statute has been a great success in limiting the cost of malpractice insurance in California. Previous attempts to dump MICRA have failed, but now the law is under determined attack from trial attorneys and some health care leaders. Trial attorneys claim the Legislature and the governor are much more sympathetic to some change in the law. At least, they say, the cap should be expanded to reflect inflation, and are looking for $800,000 with built-in regular adjustments. And if MICRA fails in California, can our Hawaii law be far behind?

You Can Fool Some of the People ----

Merck makes two compounds with the same active ingredient, Finasteride. Proscar is a 5 mg. dose for prostatic hypertrophy, while Propecia is 1 mg. for baldness. The two tablets are similarly priced although Proscar has 5 times the effective dose. Also, Proscar is covered by health insurance plans, but Propecia is considered to be used for a cosmetic condition, and not covered. Now, baldness patients are getting prescriptions for Proscar and cutting the tablet into four or five pieces with a razor blade or a plastic pill splitter. Insurers are calling it insurance fraud. Merck claims that Propecia is priced fairly, and strongly opposed Proscar misuse. The underlying reality is that pharmaceuticals are very expensive, and that patients feel no dishonesty in some creative dosages manipulation.

Choose your Airline and your Toilet Paper Through a Process of Elimination.

With turn around time sometimes as short as twenty minutes, airplanes are getting dirtier than ever. A decent cleaning job only occurs when the aircraft is shut down over night. Frequently as planes stay on the go during the day, they become garbage pits with newspapers, plastic cups, scattered napkins, food particles, even disposable diapers stuffed between seats or in pockets. Flight attendants collect pillows, fold blankets, and pick up magazines and papers between flights, but do not do "major cleaning." Airlines flew about 70% full last year, the highest in 20 years, and increased passenger loads means longer loading and unloading times, especially with multiple carry-ons. It all accrues to less time for cleaning. Airlines are criticized for not having clean air, but only recently have passengers begun to complain about wallowing for hours in someone else’s trash. In fact, a thorough cleaning of carpets, seats, and cushion repair only occur once a month. America is very much in need of an airline with panache — clean cabins, sufficient space, fresh air, enough flight attendants, and palatable meals.

Losses of $880 Million in Two Years

Kaiser Permanente had some bright spots in 1998, such as Hawaii, Portland, Oregon, and Washington D.C. It’s a good thing they had some sunshine, because for the year Kaiser had net losses of $434 million. This makes two consecutive terrible years for Kaiser, because 1997 produced net operating losses of $447 million. The huge deficits were attributed to high pharmacy and hospital costs, as well as out of network services. Still, Kaiser anticipates a return to profitability by delaying capital expenditures and improving hospital operations. Kaiser has long been the poster ad for politicians citing the efficiency, quality, and cost effectiveness of HMO care, so when the yardstick bends, what then?

Just Exactly What is Diddley Squat?

We already have the washeria expanded with a cocktail bar, and now we have the telephone soda machine. In Australia, the Telstra Corp. is combining a soda-vending machine with a pay telephone. Soft drinks can be purchased using a prepaid calling card while you punch up your stockbroker. The gimmick is still in trials, but the phone people expect the machine to appeal to younger public telephone users.

Eat What you Want - Stay Fit - Die Anyway.

Chow down, egg-lovers. A Harvard School of Public Health study published in JAMA tells us that a diet which includes eggs does not in fact engender cardiovascular disease. The report is based upon a 12 year study of 120,000 people, and found that patients who average an egg a day face no higher risk of heart attack or stroke than those people who rarely eat eggs. Researchers analyzed data according to five rates of egg consumption, ranging from less than one egg a week to more than one a day. Surprise! They found no evidence that increased ingestion was associated with higher incidence of cardiac disease or stroke. Because of cholesterol content, eggs have long been believed to cause cardiovascular disease, although no one to this time had attempted to prove that presumption. Frank Hu M.D., lead author of the study, suggests that people should pay more attention to broader aspects of their diet — avoiding saturated fats, animal fats, and hydrogenated vegetable oil while increasing fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and olive and soybean oils.

Addenda

❖ The average American eats 5,666 eggs in a lifetime. 
❖ Americans consume more than 20 lbs of candy per person per year. 
❖ In London, it is against the law to make love on a parked motorcycle. (And if it’s moving?)

Aloha and keep the faith — rts