IF IT IS A FACT, PROOF IS NECESSARY. IF IT'S A MIRACLE ANY SORT OF EVIDENCE WILL DO.

While traditional medical care requires a comprehensive education, examination, demonstrated competence, continuing medical education, peer review, clinical monitoring, and licensure, “alternative-care” requires nothing more than self-appointment. Herbal medicine, energy healing, massage therapy, acupuncture, chiropractic, naturopathy, faith healing are the order of the day in various medical venues. The body of American medicine is being invaded by pretenders in ever increasing numbers. Some HMOs are offering "alternative-care" and some states require that complementary plans be offered! At Maui Memorial Hospital (excuse me, Medical Center) we have lectures from a naturpath with CME approval yet. (I'm not making this up!) No doubt phrenology, iridology, and palm reading are soon to be added. Hey, why not? Just forget about education, intelligence, logic and the like, and merely adopt the “eastern” philosophy of mystical story-telling. Koch, Pasteur, Lister, Halsted, Fleming, Sabin, Salk, and the other medical science giants are spinning in their graves. The year 2000 is looking more like the year 1900. Where is Flexner when we need him again?

IS THIS THE BEST I'M GONNA FEEL?

The most useful dose of science to date has been injected into the continuing debate relative to the medical benefits of marijuana. An Institute of Medicine panel was convened at the request of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. The study took 18 months to complete at a cost of $896,000, and was not done for political reasons, but to inform the current debate. The panel deliberately avoided entering the policy arena. The conclusion was that there is basic research which suggests that active substances in marijuana can be effective in control of pain and chemotherapy-induced nausea associated with AIDS and advanced cancer. The panel did not find existing data to support the use of the drug for glaucoma, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson’s disease or Huntington’s disease. Additionally, it was noted that the smoked form of marijuana has definite limitations with possible harmful results, and a better delivery system is needed. Therefore, smoked marijuana should be recommended only for those terminally ill patients or those with debilitating symptoms who do not respond to approved drugs.

THE ISSUE IS NOT SANITY VS. INSANITY, BUT MORE OR LESS INSANITY.

A 78 year old man appeared in the ER with chest pain, dizziness, and blackouts. He gave a lucid and coherent history, but the nurse noted that he was “somewhat paranoid” and stated that the IRS gave him AIDS twice. (Everyone who has not been screwed-over by the IRS, raise your hand.) His cardiologist and attending physician believed he was rational when the surgical procedure was explained and consent obtained. When asked if he wanted his children informed, he was resentful and said no. He signed the form in the presence of a cousin who was visiting him. After the surgery, he suffered a stroke and was severely disabled. His adult children brought a law suit claiming a lack of informed consent, and stated that he had previously been treated for psychiatric problems. The jury cleared the physicians, and the appeals court upheld the decision noting that the patient functioned normally in most situations. Still, for those of us dealing with geriatric patients, it is prudent to have another member of the family in attendance, especially adult offspring, when explaining the necessity for surgery.

AUTHORITY TENDS TO ASSIGN JOBS TO THOSE LEAST ABLE TO DO THEM.

Two crash victims with severe head injuries were brought to a small rural medical hospital. The physician in charge transferred the patients to a larger facility for adequate care. One of the patients died. A Department of Health and Human Services administrative judge ruled that the transfer was inappropriate and levied a fine of $100,000 against the physician for violating the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act. On appeal, the court delivered a stern rebuke to the HHS ruling and found that the doctor had followed the letter and spirit of the law. The Circuit Court of Appeals recognized that the patients’ best chance of survival was with stabilization and transfer. “The doctor acted properly under very trying and difficult circumstances and should be exonerated of any wrongdoing.” But the real issue is why did the HHS engage such a moron for a judge in the first place?

NOTHING IS SO GOOD AS IT SEEMS BEFOREHAND.

The stampede to buy sport utility vehicles (SUVs) has produced some interesting and not too pretty trauma data. These top heavy road hogs are much more likely to roll over in crashes, and the fatality rate in rollovers is more than twice as high as for cars. SUVs, minivans, and pickups make up about one third of registered vehicles, but were involved in half the deaths that occurred in multiple vehicle crashes. Moreover, they are hard on occupants of ordinary cars, causing at least 2,000 additional deaths that would not have occurred had the auto collided with another car instead of a SUV. The high bumper placement, heavier weight, and resistance to bending when crashed into, makes them more deadly than autos. Starting this fall, the Dept. of Transportation, will require manufacturers to apply a warning label to SUVs about the high rollover danger. Why do so many yuppies want a clunky-looking, over-priced, gas-guzzling, four or five passenger, four by four, anyway?

TRUST ONLY THOSE WHO STAND TO LOSE AS MUCH AS YOU DO WHEN THINGS GO WRONG.

Much troubled PhyCor, the practice management company, is bringing a lawsuit against a Florida dermatologist, Norman Friedman, M.D., and 49 other "John Doe" defendants, alleging libel. By posting messages on an Internet chat board the defendants related problems with PhyCor's management. From a high of $32 per share in October 1997, PhyCor stock plummeted to $5 in October 1998 and has stayed at that level. A typical Internet message was “Who would buy PhyCor if they really know the truth?” According to one attorney, PhyCor will have to prove a cause-and-effect relationship which will be a difficult thing to do. But, as one physician said, “I think it’s harassment more than anything, but it will shut people up.”

Addenda

- The first electric dental drill was patented in 1875.
- A challenge: try to explain Hitler to a teenager.
- Four years after the first Edsel rolled off the assembly line, only one car had ever been reported stolen.

Aloha and keep the faith — rts