The American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery (ASCRS) is continuing to explore the reports of corneal melts following the use of generic diclofenac. The Executive Committee of ASCRS and the Cataract Special Interest Group unanimously agree that corneal complications can result from the use of topical NSAIDs now on the market. So far, the problem is case reporting, but ASCRS has contracted with Johns Hopkins School of Medicine to conduct additional epidemiological studies with those physicians who have reported complications. Contrarily, CIBA Vision has reviewed the results of an internal investigation and ongoing safety data and announced that it is confident in the safety of its nonsteroidal Voltaren Ophthalmic, and will not recall or suspend distribution of the product. Moreover, the company stated that the recent complications reported in the ASCRS survey do not reflect upon the safety of topical NSAIDs. Somehow, one cannot avoid the feeling that this issue is headed for some expensive litigation.

The disturbing apparent fact is that the pool of applicants for medical school is shrinking. Between 1997 and 1998, 4.7% fewer students were seeking a career as a doctor of medicine, and the number is down 13% from 1996. Theories abound—a changing healthcare industry, a booming economy with more and varied opportunities for bright young people, a loss of physician autonomy—these are a sample. Ask any physician whether in "private" practice, or under contract, and you will hear the answer. Sadly, a magnificent, honorable profession is being systematically degraded. The invasion of the bean counters, lawyers, contractors, DEA thugs, and investigators, all endorsed and encouraged by a bloated federal and private insurance bureaucracy, is the most likely explanation. Despite the exciting, exploding technology with great advances in therapeutics and pharmaceuticals, implants, transplants, imaging, fiberscopes, microscopy, lasers, and minimal invasive procedures, many doctors are no longer happy with their chosen profession.

The First Amendment: Is The State Protecting The Constitution?

The recent complications reported in the ASCRS survey do not reflect upon the safety of topical NSAIDs. Somehow, one cannot avoid the feeling that this issue is headed for some expensive litigation. The disturbing apparent fact is that the pool of applicants for medical school is shrinking. Between 1997 and 1998, 4.7% fewer students were seeking a career as a doctor of medicine, and the number is down 13% from 1996. Theories abound—a changing healthcare industry, a booming economy with more and varied opportunities for bright young people, a loss of physician autonomy—these are a sample. Ask any physician whether in "private" practice, or under contract, and you will hear the answer. Sadly, a magnificent, honorable profession is being systematically degraded. The invasion of the bean counters, lawyers, contractors, DEA thugs, and investigators, all endorsed and encouraged by a bloated federal and private insurance bureaucracy, is the most likely explanation. Despite the exciting, exploding technology with great advances in therapeutics and pharmaceuticals, implants, transplants, imaging, fiberscopes, microscopy, lasers, and minimal invasive procedures, many doctors are no longer happy with their chosen profession.

The First Amendment: Is The State Protecting The Constitution?

The recent complications reported in the ASCRS survey do not reflect upon the safety of topical NSAIDs. Somehow, one cannot avoid the feeling that this issue is headed for some expensive litigation. The disturbing apparent fact is that the pool of applicants for medical school is shrinking. Between 1997 and 1998, 4.7% fewer students were seeking a career as a doctor of medicine, and the number is down 13% from 1996. Theories abound—a changing healthcare industry, a booming economy with more and varied opportunities for bright young people, a loss of physician autonomy—these are a sample. Ask any physician whether in "private" practice, or under contract, and you will hear the answer. Sadly, a magnificent, honorable profession is being systematically degraded. The invasion of the bean counters, lawyers, contractors, DEA thugs, and investigators, all endorsed and encouraged by a bloated federal and private insurance bureaucracy, is the most likely explanation. Despite the exciting, exploding technology with great advances in therapeutics and pharmaceuticals, implants, transplants, imaging, fiberscopes, microscopy, lasers, and minimal invasive procedures, many doctors are no longer happy with their chosen profession.

The Primary Function Of A Bureaucracy Is To Create More Bureaucracies.

Relative to the above paragraph, now the Department of Health and Human Services will spend seven million dollars to train 15,000 more volunteers to swell the number of the Senior Patrol to 21,000. These Medicare "fraud busters" are retired professionals who undergo several days of training about Medicare fraud. They in turn will educate 250,000 seniors on how to spot problems on their Medicare bills. HHS says that physicians should not be anxious if they’re honest. Yeah, Right! Now doctors have to recognize that the blue-haired retired school teacher in the reception area, might be searching for a flaw in your practice in order to realize that nice bounty into the fraud penalty. Thanks a lot, Donna Shahala, for driving a poisonous stance of suspicion between doctor and patient, when the real cheaters are elsewhere.

All Judges Judge, But Not All Have Judgement.

If you have lingered under the impression that juries are more likely than judges to rule in favor of the plaintiff, you are wrong. While juries favored plaintiffs less than 24% in malpractice cases, judges sided with them in 38%, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics’ Civil Justice Survey of State Courts. Judges were also likely to grant higher awards with a median of $454,000, compared to juries $254,000. The only statistic which might be deemed favorable is that cases decided by judges move through the system more quickly with 74% resolved in less than two years. Just 37% of jury cases were decided within two years.

When You Have Two Masters, One Always Has A Bigger Whip.

Cynthia Herdrich had severe belly pains and tried to see her HMO physician. Because the facility was booked, she had to wait more than a week. Her inflamed appendix ruptured and peritonitis developed. She ultimately recovered, but sued her doctor and the group for malpractice, and was awarded $35,000. The patient further alleged that the incentive structure that allows physicians to profit from decreased utilization, results in a conflict of interest which is actionable by law. Attorneys for the physician and the HMO claim that the court has created a new form of liability for physicians and managed care organizations. Now the U.S. Supreme Court will decide whether a patient can sue her physician-owned HMO for allegedly putting profits ahead of care. Consumer advocates have long held that financial incentives harm patient care. In simple terms, can a doctor serve two masters? This case ought to be a no-brainer, and it’s about time.

Doctors Have Become The Pinata At The Medical Party.

Disciplinary action against physicians varies widely from state to state, according to a study by Public Citizen, a Nader advocacy group in Washington D.C. For example, for 1998 in Alaska 15.4 cases per 1,000 physicians ranked at the top of the list, while Tennessee cases were 0.85/1000, at the bottom of the list for discipline. To put it more simply, the doctor in Alaska is 18 times more likely to be disciplined than in Tennessee. Hawaii ranks toward the lower numbers at 39th with 2.94 per 1000. Actually in Hawaii in 1998, 10 doctors out of a population of 3399 non-federal physicians in Hawaii were disciplined in 1998. The disparity between states is largely due to a lack of adequate staff or budget to do a good job of investigating and following up on complaints.

The Bare Facts Could Tick You Off.

You might expect that nudists would be more subject to tick bites than those of us who cover our arms and legs in the outdoors. But strangely, that is not the case. According to a 1998 study by a team of researchers at the University of Connecticut Health Center with the cooperation of 300 nudist campers, found just one case of Lyme disease. Despite having all that appetizing collection of flesh, the ticks seem to prefer to do their biting and blood sucking under cover.

We’re All Going Down The Same Road In Different Directions.

Now with a booming economy, unemployment near record low, inflation held in check, and stock market roaring past 11,000 on the Dow Jones Industrial Average, the number of uninsured should be steadily decreasing. But, that is not true. This year, 43 million Americans find themselves without health care coverage, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That is 1.7 million more than 1996, and is 16.1% of the U.S. population. Why is this? And if these data are true, what happens when times get tough? Would an employer mandated health plan such as Hawaii’s law, work to ease the problem?

ADDENDA

* Flu was first described by Hippocrates in 412 B.C.
* The first person killed by a train was run over during the opening ceremonies of the Liverpool and Manchester railway in England, September 15, 1830.
* Elvis never gave an encore - not once.
* The Supreme Court has ruled that there can be no nativity scene in Washington, D.C. This is not for separation of church and state, but they couldn’t find three wise men and a virgin.

Aloha and keep the faith —rts