
Our American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO) statisticians have learned to spin figures like politicians. After vigorous lobbying by the AMA and many other Medicare providers, Congress canceled the scheduled 4.4% Medicare cut which was based on the erroneous calculations made during the Clinton administration. At the same time, they instituted a much needed 1.6% increase. It is a sad swing; and our AAO implied this means a $16,000 annual increase. Not really. A figure closer to $4,000 is much nearer to reality, and hardly a number which even provides for annual increases in overhead and inflation. This is not a complaint, but merely a desire for accuracy.

What Use Is Wisdom When Folly Reigns?

While the Hawaii Medical Association is struggling with our legislature regarding doctor assisted suicide and the informed consent statute, physicians in some states are taking drastic steps about malpractice. The increase in medical liability premiums in Hawaii is a painful 25% for 2003, but Pennsylvania has gone off the charts. Ophthalmic Mutual Insurance Company (OMIC), sponsored by the AAO, increased about 50% with premiums ranging from $7000 to $31,000. Premiums for ophthalmologists have risen an average of 20 to 50% in the past year. In Illinois, Ob-Gyns have been increased 40%, general surgeons 44%, and internists 62%. Neurosurgeons are facing a premium of over $200,000 beginning July 1st. In response, some doctors are closing their doors to certain patients, reducing medical services, and putting access to health care at risk in some areas. ISMIE Mutual Insurance Co., Illinois’ largest malpractice carrier, stopped accepting new business January 1st, and has dropped some risky clients. How bad must it get before we have a federal MICRA statute?

A Woman is Only A Woman, But A Good Cigar Is A Smoke.
(Pogo)

The matter of women’s rights is one area of President Bush’s agenda which could cost him dearly for his planned reelection in 2004. The Prez decided to reactivate the FDA’s Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory Committee. The committee makes important decisions on matters relating to drugs used in the practice of OB/GYN, such as hormone therapy, contraception, infertility, sterilization procedures and pregnancy termination. The committee must be reappointed, and as chair, he selected a specialist in obstetrics and gynecology named W. David Hager, M.D. Dr. Hager calls himself “pro-life.” So what? So, he has written a book “As Jesus Cared for Women: Restoring Women Then and Now.” He cites biblical accounts of Christ healing women with cases from his own practice. He wrote a book with his wife, “Stress and the Woman’s Body,” which suggests that women who suffer from PMS should seek help by praying and reading the bible. He is working to revoke approval of mifepristone (RU-486), and he refuses to prescribe contraceptives to unmarried women. Surely, Dubya could find a true medical scientist for this crucial role. As current events demonstrate so painfully, separation of church and state is extremely important for good government.

The Suspense Is Terrible. I Hope It Will Last.

If you find a way to make a few more dollars practicing medicine, then get ready for government interference. The growing group of physicians in so-called boutique, concierge, VIP or premium practices, charge a retainer fee and agree to provide greater access and more personal care. They intentionally limit their practice size. Those two California Democrats, stalwart protectors of the elderly and downtrodden, Henry Waxman and Fortney “Pete” Stark, have asked HHS Secretary Thompson for a specific position on the issue. Is the $1500 charge made by MDVIP double billing, or charging beyond the limits for a service? Counsel for MDVIP maintains that the membership fee includes annual physical examination, and preventative services not covered by Medicare. So far, it remains a gray area, and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has not made a ruling.

Religion Is the Masterpiece Of Animal Training. It Teaches How To Think.

Tracy India, a well-behaved, straight-A, 14 year old student at Horace Maynard Middle School in Union, Tennessee, is not a Christian. She refused to play Mary in a school Christmas play, would not attend a religious retreat, and her mother refused permission for her to go to a tent revival meeting during school hours. She was frequently sent to the principal’s office. He wanted her to talk about her religious beliefs, but she would not. Her mother also refused to talk about religion stating it was not a proper subject for a public school. For this behavior, India was repeatedly harassed, physically and verbally abused by the other students. She was attacked as she knelt at her locker, and suffered injuries to her forehead, nose and lips. She was called derogatory names, “witch,” “lesbian,” “satan worshiper.” Ugly graffiti was written on her locker in permanent ink which the school would not remove, nor would they give her another locker. Her parents are now home-schooling India, and a lawsuit has been filed against the Union County Schools. You gotta hand it to those Tennessee bible thumpers — they know how to handle non-believers.


In the loss prevention sphere of medical liability, the Duke University Hospital transplant episode is both unconscionable and unexplainable. A spokesman stated that steps were being taken to make certain that such an event never occurs again. One has to wonder why such steps were not taken routinely? Transfusion experts have stated that a person is 100 times more likely to receive the wrong blood as one is to contract a disease from donated blood. Two thirds of the errors occur at the bedside with mislabeling specimens or mis-identifying patients. Bar coding and double and triple checking practices are established operations, however, many hospitals still use archaic methods prone to human error in collecting, labeling and storing specimens and blood. This shocking death at a prestigious, high-profile institution should help move the FDA to require bar coding on all medications, blood, and other biologic products. Administrators who complain about added expense, should compare it with the time lost and huge costs of legal action.

“Did You Know Mickey Mouse Wears A Spinal Gone Watch?”

The doctor is always open to people with a clever idea and some ingenuity. Hale Dougherty, M.D., after 40 years of family practice, built a side business around the political joke of the 1970’s. The doctor commissioned an art student to sketch a caricature of the one-time-veep, which he placed on the face of an inexpensive watch. Sprio was seen flashing a peace sign and dressed in red, white and blue. No marketing company would touch it, so the doc and his wife rented a post office box, placed an ad in the Los Angeles Free Press, and marketed the watch themselves for $14.95. “People went nuts over it. It absolutely took over our lives,” said Patricia Dougherty. Pierre Salinger ordered six, Elizabeth Taylor a dozen, and after Ethel Kennedy appeared on television wearing one, the phones never stopped ringing. The enterprising doctor died recently at age 71, but his legacy is an inspiration.

Nothing Is More Dangerous Than Conscientious Stupidity.

With the very heavy February snow storm in Ohio, artists as well as children went out to play. Crystal Lynn, created a life size figure of a woman apparently including a significant bust. One male passer-by (John Ashcroft?), phoned the police to complain. “It’s just snow!” said Ms. Lynn. Nonetheless, a police officer threatened her with disorderly conduct if she didn’t remove the snow lady or cover up the bosom with a cloth. How about pasties and a thong?

ADDENDA

 cavalry thought wearing an earring in a pierced ear improved their eyesight.
• Center for Advancement of Health states that people who skip annual vacations, increase the chance of a fatal heart attack by 32%.
• According to clinical trials 75 to 80% of patients achieved the same results with a placebo, as were obtained with six of the most widely used antidepressants.
• People in Salt Lake City eat more Jello than any other American city.
• When turkeys mate, do they think of swans?

Aloha and keep the faith —rtssh