



Don't Let Religion Drive You Batty.

In Wisconsin, a fifteen year old girl was attending a church service in September. A bat fell to the floor, so she picked it up and released it outside. While handling the bat, the girl was bitten on the left index finger. No medical attention was sought, and no rabies post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) was done. About one month later, the girl complained of fatigue, and tingling and numbness of her left hand. Her symptoms rapidly progressed to double vision, unsteady gait, and then nausea and vomiting. Her pediatrician referred her to a neurologist who did an LP, MRI, then let her go home. Over the next 36 hours, she developed slurred speech, nystagmus, tremors, increased lethargy, and spiked a fever to 102deg. F. On the sixth day of illness the bat bite history was reported and rabies was considered for the first time. Saliva, CSF, blood serum, and nuchal skin samples were submitted to CDC for testing. Rabies virus specific antibodies were detected in the CSF, the patient developed hypersalivation and was intubated,. All supportive measures were initiated including neuro-protective measures, a drug-induced coma, ventilator support, and intravenous ribavirin (with investigative protocol). One month after onset of symptoms, the patient was extubated, and three days later moved to a rehab unit. In another month, she was able to walk with help, ride a stationary bicycle, solve math puzzles, use sign language and was regaining speech. The prognosis for full recovery is still speculative. The girl joins a very small group (6) who have survived a clinical rabies infection, since the mortality rate for unvaccinated patients is believed to be 100%.

Auntie Em: I Hate Kansas. Toto And I Are Leaving. Dorothy

Kansas state law criminalizes intercourse, kissing, fondling and other touching with a child younger than age 16. The attorney general interprets this law to apply even if the people are of the same age and the sexual contact is consensual. Doctors point out that such reporting will breach doctor/patient confidentiality, and will cause adolescents to be afraid to seek medical care. Moreover, this loose-cannon AG is demanding the complete medical records of nearly 90 females who had abortions. An injunction has been issued to permit physicians to decide each case, but the state is appealing the injunction. It is up to the 10th U.S. Court of Appeals to rule on the injunction. While the courts respect adults right to privacy, case law for adolescents isn't as developed. Many physicians disagree with the Kansas attorney general. The AMA, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Medical Women's Association, and a dozen other organizations, have argued that patient care will suffer under this law. The Kansas AG behavior makes one wonder if he was ever a teen-ager.

Stop Repeat Offenders. Don't Reelect Them.

Physicians are simply refusing to be on call without compensation, so Queens is going to the legislature. It appears probable that the Hawaii legislature is going to approve a request from Queens Medical Center for \$6.9 million as an emergency appropriation. The hospital presently budgets \$4.9 annually to pay physicians to provide on-call coverage, and the figure is expected to rise to \$6.9 in 2006. Doctors are beleaguered by caring for the uninsured, by lower reimbursements from Quest, Medicaid, Medicare and HMSA, which fail to cover actual costs, plus increased medical liability expense. Queens is not unique with this problem, because it now prevails on all the neighbor islands as well. House Health Committee Chair Dennis Arakaki fears that without a viable trauma center, Hawaii "would be cast in the light of a third world country." Senate Health Committee Chair Roz Baker is concerned that this is an ongoing problem, and she fears having to face a subsidy every year. She correctly recognized that the problem requires broader consideration, including reimbursement, medical school training, and malpractice tort reform. The basic underlying, frightening fact is that patient access is already evaporating, and the Legislature just can't seem to wake up. (See below regarding ER docs in Virginia.)

When You've Got Them By The B___s, Their Hearts and Minds Will Follow

In Virginia, a group of emergency physicians elected to leave the Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield plan, the largest health insurer in Virginia, and a subsidiary of WellPoint Inc., the nation's largest private insurance plan. The 17 members of the group refused to accept reimbursement rates 30% to 40% below other commercial plans, and left the bargaining table. The ER docs have an exclusive contract with Mary Washington Hospital in Fredericksburg, the only hospital within a one hour drive for most patients. Needless to say, the refusal to continue negotiating with the Blues has brought

tremendous pressure to bear on both sides. Patients must pay considerably more for ER visits, and employers and politicians are begging both sides to resume negotiations. The good part of this is that the public in the area has come to realize the immense power of big insurance, and the problem of meager reimbursements. As is well known, only physicians under the umbrella of a single entity can act in concert to confront these abusive third parties, and that is the extremely powerful tool that carriers (e.g.HMSA) have over the rest of the medical community.

— Party on, Fredericksburg Emergency Medicine Alliance.

When You Smell Smoke, It's Time For Dinner.

Marijuana smokers frequently have severe hunger pangs, called "munchies," and puffing cannabis may result in weight gain (or is it the inactivity?). Working retro from the premise that cannabis stimulates appetite, French researchers at *Sanofi-Aventis* theorized that blocking cannabinoid receptors in the brain would work to control food consumption. Compounds with potential inhibitory activity against cannabinoid receptors were studied, and a new drug, *Acomplia* (rimonabant) was developed. Results from a 16 week phase II trial showed that treatment with the drug resulted in significant weight loss in obese patients, and was well tolerated. Moreover, the drug caused a decrease in desire to smoke. Additional data reported at a meeting of the European Society of Cardiology, showed that obese patients taking *Acomplia* over the first year of a multi-center study, achieved reductions in body weight, waist circumference, and improved lipid profiles. What a deal! One pill a day, and overweight patients lost weight and many stopped smoking. The drug is still investigational, and at least 18 months away from the market, but it is already the latest fad pharmaceutical.

Say Again, Officer. You Want Me To Give You The Finger?!!

A biometric firm called *Identix* is marketing a wireless device that allows law enforcement officers to scan a person's fingertip, and beam the scan to a data base to search for a match. The device called *IBIS* is handheld and can also snap a mug shot. *Identix* claims the technology saves officer's time and improves safety by positively identifying people they stop. In Ontario, California, using 65 *IBIS*s the computer found 700 matches which resulted in 170 arrests. Police in Portland, Oregon and Hennepin County Minnesota have also purchased the scanners. One more piece of technology to erase anonymity..

Confession May Be Good For The Soul, But What About Your Career?

Pennsylvania law requires doctors to report patients with alcohol or drug habits that might impair their driving. If they fail to do so and an accident occurs, the doctor can be held liable. In Lebanon, PA., when a 250 lb. man went to the emergency room for a heart murmur, he was asked about his drinking habits. He replied honestly that he consumed six to twelve beers a day, so the physician checked a box on a form regarding alcohol consumption. The DMV revoked the man's license, even though the man stated he never drinks and drives, and he had not had a DUI conviction for 23 years. While the law appears to make sense, does it violate patient/physician confidentiality? And why should another person (doctor) be held responsible for someone else's crime?

Identity Theft? Don't Expect Your Bank To Help.

An important indicator of identity theft is a change in credit bureau information which goes to your bank. According to a study by *Javelin Strategy & Research*, a financial services consulting firm, none of the 40 banks studied, alerts its customers to such changes. Only two banks, Wells Fargo and E*Trade, lets customers sign up for e-mail alerts after their personal information has been altered.

ADDENDA

- It is estimated that 75% of all American dollars have traces of cocaine.
- Denver International Airport is larger than the entire city of Boston.

Aloha and keep the faith —rts■

Contents of this column do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of the Hawaii Ophthalmological Society and the Hawaii Medical Association. Editorial comment is strictly that of the writer.