



One Thing Leads To Another—But Does It Have To?

Reacting to the scare of the highly contagious Creutzfeldt-Jacobs (mad cow) disease, Britain's health boss ordered opticians to dispose of all trial contact lenses after each use. The Association of Optometrists expressed concern that the government gave no advance warning to practitioners, and the order caused considerable alarm among contact lens wearers. There is zero evidence that any mad cow disease deaths have been the result of contact lenses, and the order was characterized as simply a precautionary measure. Sounds like the stampede of the mad Health Secretary.

Tough As It Is, When Americans Roll Up Their Sleeves, They Still Manage To Ignore This Problem.

Whether it is prosperity, our electronic world, changes in occupational physical demands, eating habits, or simple indolence, a very serious underlying disorder with the health of too many people is excess weight, pork, obesity, fatness — the all-American accepted illness. The present White House occupant is at least 10 lbs. overweight. Unfortunately, too often the problem involves the physician as well. National data show that one-third to one-half of adults are overweight, and one-fourth are clinically obese. Accompanying diseases are high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, sleep apnea, some cancers and cardiovascular disease. Along with these measurable conditions are social stigmatization and accompanying psychological distress with depression and plunging self-esteem. It is not just an adult problem; the American Academy of Pediatrics committee on nutrition has established that obesity is the number one problem in child health. 14% of children and 12% of adolescents are overweight with the attendant possibility for some chronic diseases later in life. Forget the counseling and ignore the diet books. The solution is hard but not complicated. It takes a dedicated change in life style to make exercise a priority, and use that most difficult of exercises, the push-away (from the table).

If It Ain't Broke Use It Again.

Hospitals don't want to talk about it, but the squeeze on reimbursements for medical services has caused the reuse of medical instruments. A 1999 survey of 132 hospitals revealed that almost half routinely reuse medical devices labeled for single use. Manufacturers fear liability for the misuse of their products, but also often label products single use not for safety but because they want to sell more. In January, a piece of reused catheter broke off in a woman's heart, and the doctors were unable to remove it. The hospital officials stated that the woman is in no pain or danger. A Mayo Clinic Administrator stated that the Mayo Clinic reuses special catheters to map heart problems five or six times "without any evidence of infection." The question is legal dynamite, because drug companies and hospitals are seen as deep pockets. A good plaintiff's attorney will see a big company name in a case involving a reused device, and the door is open. Juries are eager to punish what would be perceived as a cost saving mechanism with patients at increased risk.

Don't Feed Me Any More Cheese. I Just Want Out Of The Trap.

The Health Care Financing Administration claims that reductions in Medicare payments do not truly impact patient practices. The financial problems of so many practices around the country belies that bureaucratic assumption. The American Medical Association's Socio-economic Monitoring System (SMS) survey established some shocking statistics: (1) 31% of physicians have cut staff, salary increases and staff benefits (2) 36% have cut their own salaries and benefits (3) 61% said that Medicare cuts were a major influence on plans for early retirement (4) 69% said Medicare cuts led them to increase productivity by spending less time with patients and referring out complicated cases. Additional alterations in medical practice involved not renewing or updating office equipment, moving to a new (cheaper) location, reducing or refusing telephone consultations and counseling. Is it any wonder that organized medicine delves into previously unthinkable areas such as a medical union?

If You Can't Find Something Everyone Agrees On, It's Wrong.

The American Osteopathic Association House of Delegates has not followed the direction of the AMA. Delegates decided that unionization is not the answer to the problems of managed care. The AOA is supporting legislative

attempts to provide an antitrust exemption so that physicians can collectively negotiate with managed care organizations. The Executive Director of the AOA stated that their House of Delegates believes they can "work together with managed care organizations to create an open and constructive dialogue to benefit patients and improve the practice environment for osteopathic physicians."

Let's Really Save Medicare Dollars And Clean Out Those Nursing Homes.

"Euthanasia could become the health care industry's ultimate cost-control strategy in dealing with patients thought to have little chance of survival," J.C. Pickett, MD, President, California Medical Association. Despite opposition of the bill from the CMA and representatives of the disabled and hospice organizations, the Judiciary Committee of the California state assembly has approved a proposal to legalize physician-assisted suicide, following in the steps of Oregon. At least the committee didn't approve reimbursement for death-dealing physicians as was done by their neighbor to the north. The medical association wants to alleviate end-of-life suffering by improving access to hospice care, providing counseling and pain-management services.

Governments Are More Likely To Collapse By A Deficit Than to Perish By The Sword.

That Medicare reform is vital should be obvious. With the birth of Medicare in 1965 there were six workers for every Medicare recipient, but today that ratio is three to one. The burgeoning size of the Medicare population is frightening, and the increased longevity coupled with sophisticated medical care is pushing program costs to constantly higher levels. President Clinton has proposed to add prescription drugs as a benefit to the existing program, a worthy thought, but Medicare does not need a new entitlement added to a poorly crafted funding system. The proposal appears modest today, but the drug benefit will surely balloon. The plan has been compared to building a swimming pool atop a rickety building. What Congress and the President should carefully consider is the Breaux-Thomas plan from the President's Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare. The proposed reforms are modeled on the plan serving members of Congress and federal employees.

The Pain In Spain Is Plainly From The Gain (numerical)

Multiple problems exist in the health care system of the United States, including the financial crash of many management companies, the need to curb HMO abuse of patients and physicians, the squeeze on reimbursements by Medicare and other third parties, and an abiding litigious population spurred by an army of personal injury attorneys. However, consider Europe where many young trained physicians are unemployed. According to a recent JAMA article, in Spain 22% of physicians are unemployed, and many of these are highly trained professionals who passed a rigorous examination and then spent up to 5 years in residency. It's really a question of numbers with more medical schools and graduates than necessary for Spain's population, and that is where America's medical system appears headed also.

The Young Doctor Has 20 Drugs For Each Disease; The Old Doctor Has One Drug For 20 Diseases.

When California Attorney General Bill Lockyer told Attorney General Janet Reno and drug czar Barry McCaffrey that he has the authority to conduct marijuana research under California law, he was told he would be vulnerable to arrest and prosecution for violating federal law. Lockyer had convened a state-wide task force to study ways to implement the state's medical marijuana law, and hoped for federal support for the idea. No way is the Clinton administration going to surrender to "reefer madness" at this time. Instead, go ahead and write a prescription for an innocent drug like morphine.

ADDENDA

- ❖ Literally translated, the word carnival means "flesh farewell."
 - ❖ About 50% of U.S. workers say they have had sex in the workplace. Favorite place - the boss's desk.
 - ❖ Duke Ellington once greeted Richard Nixon, and said he kissed the President four times, one for each cheek.
 - ❖ Such is the human race, it often seems a pity that Noah did not miss the boat.
- Aloha and keep the faith —rts■