Repentance is not so much remorse for what was done as fear of the consequences.

Rarely does the federal government file criminal antitrust charges against health care professionals, but it happened for only the second time in 50 years. The Justice Department proceeded successfully against the Lake County (Texas) Optometric Society charging that the group conspired to raise, fix, and stabilize the price of eye exams. The defendant pleaded guilty and agreed to pay a fine of $75,000 and the group has since disbanded. The Texas Optometric Association (Lake County was once a member) has taken no position on the case.

We hate the people we love because they are the only ones who can hurt us.

An HIV-positive man was hospitalized in a Florida hospital and was to be transferred to a hospital in Alabama. Because travel could not be arranged by ambulance, the patient’s brother came from Mississippi to provide the transportation, but he did not know that his brother had AIDS. In transit a heparin lock was dislodged from the patient’s arm, and fluid from the lock site contacted the brother’s hands where he had multiple scratches from a recent fishing trip. Now the brother is HIV positive, and he brought suit against the Florida hospital. The Florida Supreme Court ruled that the complaint was not a claim for medical malpractice, and it was disallowed.

We are inclined to judge ourselves by our ideas; others by their acts.

W. Andres Harris MD, an ophthalmologist in Salem, Oregon, has again demonstrated that one man can make a difference. After learning that the U.S. Army was developing laser weapons that cause permanent blindness, Dr Harris wrote letters and articles calling public attention to improper use of this remarkable tool. Serving on the Board of Directors of Physicians for Social Responsibility, Dr Harris prodded the Board into forcing the Pentagon to abandon plans to spend $17 million to develop and purchase 75 of the high-tech weapons. Now, both the Department of Defense and the United Nations have adopted policy banning the use of lasers specifically designed to blind enemy forces.

You can fool all the people all of the time if the advertising is right and the budget is big enough.

About 12 years ago a prescient observer stated that keratotomy would not generate much market pressure because it required no major piece of technical equipment, and therefore no major industrial investment. With laser surgery, the opposite picture prevails as the media is planted with news stories, multiple educational symposia are offered, and daily mailers arrive promoting participation in an income-generating laser project. Tens of millions of dollars have been invested in the manufacture and certification of exotic lasers for PRK and cosmetic surgery, and the medical/industrial complex must be rewarded for risking their capital.

Hurry, Hurry, Hurry! Ladies and gentlemen, step right up and get...

The excimer laser photorefractive keratotomy (PRK) promoters have arrived in Hawaii. One plan offers, with just a $250 annual contribution, the surgeon can enjoy the privilege of referring his or her patient for laser refractive surgery which will be performed by the chosen one. In return, the operating surgeon will kick back 40% of the laser fee, for “pre and post-op care.” P.T. Barnum lives!

A man’s dying is more the survivors’ affair than his own.

Dr Gerald Klooster, Sr, a retired obstetrician, has developed Alzheimer’s disease. A psychiatric ex-amination of the patient’s cognitive capacity revealed “severely impaired with a score of 2 out of 30,” including inability to identify a wristwatch or describe how it was used, or to identify the month, year or location of the test. According to Dr Jack Kevorkian’s attorney, the patient, in company with his wife, provided a notarized statement that he was mentally competent and declared “that he does not want to go through the throes of Alzheimer’s.” Dr K’s attorney, Geoffrey Fieger, added that the “rest of the family is very supportive, except for one son (Dr Gerald Klooster, Jr, DO) who wants to declare his father mentally incompetent.” In fact, Dr Klooster, Sr, has three other sophisticated, adult offspring, who have said only that they were against assisted suicide. Right-to-die activists claim that the case illustrated why we must have legalized euthanasia with strictly enforced safeguards, but opponents claim there is no way to protect the patient from overzealous friends or family members who wish them to exert their right to die with dignity. Meanwhile, Dr Kevorkian has opted out and wants no part of the family dispute.

God is love, but get it in writing.

“Be careful out there,” goes a current paring phrase, and with good reason. In this era of defining informed consent, who are your friends, CYA, etc, it turns out that the HMOs are providing heavy financial support for the GOP, with not so much being spent on Democrats. Just two years ago in 1994, 12 of the largest HMOs contributed 60% of their campaign dollars to the Democrats, but in 1995, that number dropped to 25%, with 75% to Republicans, a dramatic reversal. The reason is simply that Republican plans for overhauling Medicare could result in doubling the number of beneficiaries in HMOs over the next seven years, and that would amount to about $85 billion in new business for the merchants of managed care. Don’t forget the Golden Rule of the 1990s.

There were giants in the earth in those days.

 Forgotten in the heat of Congressional jabberwocky is the fact that President Harry S. Truman in 1947 recommended term limits of 12 years for all Congresspersons (and the incumbents didn’t like it then either).

Addenda

- HMO premiums are up, medical service is more restricted, but CEOs of HMOs average income is more than double the CEO national average.
- Ski injuries have increased 300% since 1985.
- A professor is one who talks in someone else’s sleep.

Aloha and keep the faith—rts.

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