The Weathervane

It's best to stick to your principles—if you have any.

Treading where no other Hawaii physician has trod, and striking a major blow for medicine in party politics, Philip Hellreich, MD, Kailua dermatologist, was appointed to serve on the Republican Party Platform Committee in San Diego, California. Never the shy one, Phil was instrumental in placing planks in the platform to provide for (1) Medical Savings Accounts, (2) Elimination of fraud and abuse rules and (3) Elimination of the gag rules imposed by certain HMOs. Way to go, Phillip!

There's gold in them thar pigeons.

As if there weren't enough deception in the medical world, Summit Technology Chairman David Muller allegedly transferred 850,000 of his shares to an offshore company and sold them after he mysteriously received confidential documents form the FDA indicating that rival Vixs excimer laser was "commercially more appealing." Once approved, Vixs's laser for photorefractive keratotomy (PRK) would likely far outsell Summit's laser. With release of the information Summit stock went from $22 in April to $6. Some angry investors have brought suit against Summit alleging illegals in its FDA studies and in the manner in which it sold the laser and recorded revenues. How often investing doctors resemble those wooly ovine creatures obligingly lined up to donate their largesse to the clippers.

It's not an optical illusion. It just looks like one.

Perhaps you did not know that TWA flight 800 was carrying a box of donor corneas headed for France. Important point is that the box was carried in the cockpit of the Boeing 747, and no one ever opened it or inspected it after it departed the Baltimore eye bank.

The power of the state is always in inverse ratio to the power of the nation.

A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, or as pungent in this case. The Illinois Department of Public Health has challenged the Rush Eye Laser Center as to whether the center should be licensed under the state's Ambulatory Surgical Treatment Center Licensing Act. Like Hawaii's Certificate of Need law, the Illinois Department of Public Health controls ambulatory surgery centers, and perceives another area to exercise control over free enterprise in medical care. Despite reams of contrary evidence, CON laws prevail in many states, eliminating competition, protecting vested interest, and increasing the cost of medical care. Here in the land of Aloha, the Department of Accounting and General Services (DAGS) has said that the law does not control medical costs, and Governor Cayetano asked the legislature to do away with it. No way! It live on for at least another five years, because our legislature is so efficient in taking care of our entrenched institutions.

Old doctors never die. Young ones do.

A 33-year-old doctor was beaten, raped, sodomized and strangled in her office at Bellevue Hospital by a mentally ill, homeless man who had been secretly living in a hospital storage room. She was five months pregnant with her first child. Her husband brought suit claiming negligent security at the institution, and asked for $25 million. The city's lawyer offered $2 million to settle the case. Although witnesses acknowledged the hospital's fault and negligence, the jury decided against the widower and awarded no damages. Perhaps it is not relevant, however, juries appear to judge personal injury cases differently when taxpayers are the deep pocket.

The enemy of every honest man is the politician seeking power.

In Washington, your House of Representatives, ignoring recommendations from the AMA, elected by a vote of 212-210 to continue allowing tobacco growers to receive federally subsidized crop insurance and advice from agricultural extension agents. Critics of the $25 million program said that a crop that kills 400,000 smokers a year has no business getting government support. Not surprisingly, the vote was more regional than partisan.

There is almost nothing you can't be put in jail for now.

When dealing with the Internal Revenue Service, it is important to know when to call your attorney. A Houston plastic surgeon has been fighting the IRS for over 17 years although he did nothing wrong. A 1979 routine audit turned up no violations, but acting upon tips from two former employees, the IRS pursued the case. The Criminal Investigation Division was called in, and went around the doctor to obtain hospital records. Some hospitals gave in and revealed patients' records, names and addresses. Many of his patients were outraged, and blamed the doctor for the loss of confidentiality. In an unbelievably protracted case, there was no evidence that the doctor broke a single tax rule or underpaid his obligations by one cent, and ultimately the government has since cleared him fully of any wrongdoing. Yet, his many court campaigns include four trial-level proceedings, six federal appeals, and a petition to the US Supreme Court. The point here is that once a government agency begins an investigation, finds nothing serious, but has invested significant time and effort, instead of cutting losses, the investigation takes on a life of its own. As in the persistent persecution of Dr Zelko in Hilo over a prescription for appetite control, the agency goes to ridiculous lengths to try to nail the doctor. The ultimate sin is that those agents who cause so much personal damage to the reputation and peace of mind of the doctor and his family, are never brought to account for their transgressions.

Addenda

❖ Out of every tax dollar paid by New Yorkers, 21 cents goes for addiction and substance abuse. The total cost to NYC a monstrous $20 billion in 1994.
❖ Sex education in schools seems to have little or no effect on sexual activity, contraceptive use or teenage pregnancy.
❖ Beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

Aloha and keep the faith—rts.