Believe everything you hear about the government; nothing is too impossibly weird.

How confused is the present U.S. health care market? So confused, that Washington is willing to pay New York hospitals $400 million over the next six years not to educate doctors. According to HCFA, more doctors means more expenditures for Medicare, so the perceived solution is to reduce the number of resident positions. But, because the hospitals depend on the Medicare dollars of $100,000 each year for each resident physician (whom they pay $40,000), the government will continue to pay the hospitals. In return, the hospitals agree to reduce the number of resident positions by 25%.

Laser Hype! Get rich quick—or maybe not.

Summit Technology, Inc., announced plans to spin off its chain of vision-correction centers. The company plans to focus instead on its core business of selling the laser equipment to doctors. While analysts hailed the move as long overdue, they remained skeptical that Summit can turn around its flagging fortunes. Once the high-flyer, Summit has been hit hard by stiff competition, poor earnings, and a federal government inquiry over leaked documents. Additionally, the market for eye-surgery lasers has proved a disappointment, and consumers remain cautious about the surgery and its significant cost.

This plan needs a certain something—possibly burial.

The idea seemed like an instant winner to Madison Avenue. C. Everett Koop, MD one time Surgeon General, would appear on Time-Life Medical tapes telling consumers about 30 common illnesses from prostate disorders to migraine and breast cancer. Drug stores, markets and discount stores would offer vital disease information next to aspirin, band-aids and hemorrhoid cream at $20 a tape. With news star Linda Ellerbee anchoring the video and the fatherly Dr Koop sitting on the porch talking to people, the public was just waiting to be informed. After all, health was “hot.” A certain boffo bonanza! NOT! After a sales disaster, Time-Life pulled the plug on the producers, and closed the door. Dr Koop was frustrated and perplexed, called Time Warner Chairman Gerald Levin, and found the decision was irrevocable. Sorry, Doc, you should have kept your day job (and uniform).

If man had created man, he would be ashamed of his performance.

Because the Texas bar believed that lawyers were violating soliciting rules, a bar official represented herself as the mother of a Valujet crash victim. As expected, two lawyers were quickly caught by the Commission for Lawyer Discipline, but so far no charges have been filed against the ambulance chasers. In fact, they are objecting, and claim the bar has violated its own rules against misrepresentation. Texas bar officials claim they had no plans for a sting operation until they were contacted by a woman who had previously worked for two Houston attorneys who employed her to sign up victims’ families. Those fun-loving lawyer people—what a grand bunch! Makes one recall that cartoon of two snakes eating each other.

When the government has it in for you there’s no limit to what you may have to endure.

While Congress is planning additional cuts in Medicare to doctors and hospitals (including some horrifying eye surgery reductions), patients are registering their dissatisfaction with hospital care. A survey done by the American Hospital Association encompassing 37,000 people in 12 states, revealed that patients find medical centers a “nightmare to navigate,” that they get sent home before they feel ready, that they seemed alienated from their doctors, and that the hospital employs uncaring care-givers. William Speck, MD president of Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center, traces the problem to the rise of managed care, the focus on costs, and that “the whole system has become depersonalized.” Obviously there is still a significant market for independent patients and independent doctors.

Sin is geographical. Ethics are situational. Truth is elastic.

Who do you trust? The public give the President a confidence level of 38% in high ethical standing, but then the public also rates Jack Kemp, the GOP potential presidential candidate at the same level. Billy Graham, long time bible thumping evangelist, rates a 62% high ethical standing, but even he is still far behind the man the public gives the highest rating at 76%, former General Colin Powell.

The professor ultimately makes an ash of himself.

If you are old enough to recall the 60’s, you remember Professor Timothy Leary, one-time Ivy League guru of LSD and other recreational toxins (turn on, tune in, drop out). He led a generation of flower children seeking the meaning of life. Prostate CA caught up with the aging prof last May, and now he is truly headed out of this world. For a fee of $4800, Celestis, Inc., will provide an “astrofunerary” service and Leary’s ashes will go into orbit. According to predictions, the ashes will orbit 350 miles above the earth for about one year, then gradually succumb to gravity as Timothy drops out for the last time.

You don’t tell deliberate lies, but sometimes you have to be evasive.

A poll early last year revealed that 90% of Washington journalists voted for Bill Clinton, but the media scoffed when critics called that confirmation of a liberal bias. A newer survey shows most Americans disagree. The Center for Media and Public Affairs hired Louis Harris to interview 3,000 people and determine what the public thinks about journalists. Some findings: the media ignore people’s privacy, are influenced by the powerful, are too negative, have too much influence, and abuse freedom of the press. Other findings—49% think that the media usually don’t get facts straight, and most Americans think the media are biased—67% said the bias is liberal rather than conservative (even by liberals).

Addenda—

- Rhinitis is the most common chronic disease in the U.S.
- Population of Kuwait 600,000; percentage of adults employed by the government, 92%
- A lot of people have warned Pres. Clinton that Bosnia will turn into another Vietnam, which would be embarrassing for him because he will have to go back to college.

Aloha, and keep the faith—rts