The Weathervane

Russell T. Stodd MD

Usually, terrible things that are done in the name of progress are not really progress, but just terrible things.

(R. Baker)

The cloning of an ewe from the DNA of an adult sheep in Scotland has alarmed ethicists and a wide range of special interest groups from anti-abortion activists to the Roman Catholic Church, not to mention animal rights people. Theoretically, there is no reason why the technique would not work with any mammal, including human beings. While the thought of cloning a human being is rejected as “unthinkable,” society is fascinated at the prospect of genetic technology. If the process can be repeated, regulations will necessarily have to be installed. The frightening aspect is that people will always find a way to get around regulations, and “The Boys from Brazil” will come closer to reality.

There is no expedient to which a man or woman will not go to avoid the labor of thinking.

What if a patient suffers because he or she couldn’t get the immediate care needed? Example: a patient with a retinal detachment thinks he needs new glasses due to decreased visual acuity, and calls for an appointment. A delay in diagnosis and treatment results, and the patient loses useful vision. Would the doctor be liable? Oh yes, because it is assumed that the person answering the phone has the medical expertise to recognize conditions which require prompt attention. This problem generated from a managed care triage system, but it could similarly occur in your office. Train your staff.

A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.

Doctors are sometimes not ideal family persons. The demands of medical practice with long hours, interruptions, missed family appointments, emotional stress and other factors, often place a strain on family ties. A study published in the New England Journal of Medicine found that half of the psychiatrists in the study got divorced, surgeons were second at 33%, the overall average was 29%, and pediatricians, internists and pathologists showed the least number of divorces. Why so high for the shrinks? A divorce lawyer who handles physicians postulates, “It’s the pontificating. The spouse gets sick of being married to God.”

To be young is to be one of the immortal gods.

The medical community is horrified and dermatologists are citing grossly increased skin cancer risk, but the kids don’t care. Young people know the evils of solar exposure, but like alcohol and tobacco, the youthful attitude is, hey, those diseases are years away, right? So, forget wrinkles and melanoma. The Bo Derek and George Hamilton looks are very much in, and pale skin is so uncool. College kids are showing up on Hawaii’s and Florida’s beaches using lotions without SPF (skin protection factor). With names like Sizzle, Ultra Sun, and Equatorial Thrust, they are designed to enhance rather than reduce the sun rays. One senior female student from Pittsburgh said, “You’re going to die of something eventually. You might as well die tanned.”

Tobacco is a dirty weed - satisfies no normal need - makes you thin, makes you lean - takes the hair right off your bean - the worst darn stuff I've ever seen.

(Hemminger)

Cigarette maker Liggett has bailed out. The tobacco giants, R.J. Reynolds and Philip Morris, are purple with rage because the small player has opted for a confession that tobacco is addictive. Liggett will submit confirmatory research data, and it admits that advertising is directed toward teens. The bottom line for Liggett is that despite a heavy penalty, the assets of the corporation will be protected. Meanwhile in Washington D.C. the Supreme Court has refused to hear a tobacco combine appeal to set aside a Florida decision which allows the state to sue third parties who may be responsible for Medicaid costs. (Somebody phone our Attorney General.) It is all a legal game with an interminable script, and for certain it will enrich a generation of attorneys. But hey, anything that gets that poisonous tobacco weed properly identified is worthwhile.

A little inaccuracy saves a world of explanation.

Shame on President Clinton and double shame on Congress. In a gesture of attacking the Medicare expenditures, the President is beefing up the fraud units, claiming that billions of dollars are lost to Medicare and Medicaid cheats. Moreover, he and HCFA plan once again to reduce reimbursement to providers. The shame is that this is merely budget dust on the overall picture of Medicare spending with the specter of a massively enlarging Medicare population, and reserves going down. Congress and the President must advance the eligible age for social security and must address the means issue. This is a highly unpopular position to take, (AARP and grey panthers, alert!), and our brave elected representatives simply haven’t the guts to take the heat.

Laser -Let’s Acquire Some Easy Return.

Photorefractive keratectomy (PRK) and laser therapeutics remain as headline news. 1. Politics - The Governor of New Mexico vetoed a bill that would have allowed optometrists to perform PRK, and the Idaho Legislature voted down a measure which would have permitted ODs to use lasers. 2. Professional - Robert K. Dougherty, former American Academy of Ophthalmology veep for advocacy, has assumed the job of president and CEO of Pillar Point Partners, the combine that controls excimer laser royalties. Don’t forget your roots, Bob. 3. Business - Industry analysts estimate that in 1996 U.S. based corporate refractive laser centers collectively lost in excess of $100 million.

Thou shalt not worship any false idols, except Elvis.

Down in the land of grits and hominy, Alabama Judge Roy S. Moore has refused to take down the hand-carved Ten Commandments which is hanging in his courtroom. However, another judge has ruled that the tablets violate the rule of separation of church and state. Enter the Governor: he has vowed to call out the National Guard to keep the plaque in place.

Addenda—
- For eight straight years a Gallup poll has found that the public places pharmacists at the top in ethics and honesty.
- Love is an exploding cigar we willingly smoke.

Aloha, and keep the faith—rts