Everybody gets so much information all day long that they lose their common sense.

An HMO in southern California funded a research team from the Veterans Affairs Medical Center and UCLA to study rates of cataract surgery, comparing fee for service with prepaid health settings. Their findings were reported in JAMA of June 11, 1997. Factors of age, sex, and diabetes mellitus status were controlled and the data showed that FFS patients were twice as likely to have cataract extraction as patients on prepaid plans. This is a shock? The findings coincide with previous studies which revealed that prepaid plans have lower rates of cholecystectomy, appendectomy, C-sections, hysterectomy, tonsillectomy, and procedures for coronary artery disease. It should come as no surprise that increased corporate earnings equates with less patient care. As demonstrated so vividly by the airlines, when cost containment is the prime consideration, quality and service go down.

Cleanliness is next to—impossible.

Hygiene Guard is a new big brother type device invented to determine if and when bathroom users wash their hands. Employees at restaurants or other businesses must wear a badge which activates a ceiling device when they enter the porcelain closet. The badge will blink until the employee pumps the soap dispenser and stands before the wash basin for 15 seconds. The reason for this spying intrusion is simply that a survey sponsored by the American Society of Microbiology revealed that 39% of males and 26% of females do not wash their hands after using the facility. And that brings to mind that all physicians must wash hands before and after each examination.

A drug is substance that when injected into a guinea pig, produces a scientific paper.

According to a small study reported in the Archives of Ophthalmology, seventeen eye surgeons participated in an evaluation of drugs for hand tremors. The surgeons were given 200 mg. of the beta blocker propranolol, or a gelatin placebo. The placebo and caffeine-use appeared to cause a slight increase in hand tremors, but the propranolol reduced tremors by 22%.

A man's worst difficulties begin when he is able to do as he likes.

The Coalition for Excess Weight Risk Education has studied 33 of America's cities to determine the rates of obesity. Using parameters of height and weight for 20,000 people, "Fat City" turned out to be New Orleans with a rate of 37.5% of adult residents defined as obese. Denver, at the other extreme, has the lowest rate at 22.1%. The study seemed to indicate that high unemployment and low per-capita income tend to have higher rates of lardosis. Outdoor living, such as Denver, San Diego, Phoenix, appeared to be related to lower rates. Cleveland at 31.5% was said to have more ethnic food, and also harsh winters which prompt people to eat more meat, buttermilk, biscuits and fresh fries, apparently in an attempt to help during hibernation. Sorry, didn't find a figure (no pun) for Honolulu.

Honesty is the best policy—when there is money in it.

Marc Gardner, for the past three years, a manager at three Columbia Hospitals, including prestigious Sunrise Medical Center in Las Vegas, resigned to write a tell-all book about the sins of the huge medical company, which he hopes to call "The Columbia Malignancy." He earned a degree in hospital administration, and first worked at a Catholic hospital, where meetings began with a prayer. When he switched to Humana hospital, he was suddenly playing golf and wheeling and dealing in the cost-cutting arena. When Columbia bought 73 spin-off Humana hospitals, Mr Gardner said "Columbia was Humana on steroids—20 times more aggressive. If I committed felonies every day." He fired 15 nursing managers, replaced RNs with LPNs who earn 1/2 as much, and purchased low cost supplies. Columbia maintained a monthly "scorecard" ranking the hospital on nearly a dozen measures, including number of surgeries, profit margin and cost of supplies, but not on quality of care. Gardner states, "Columbia hospitals exist to make money—period." Another former Columbia CEO said he was told to try to ensure that 100% of Medicare patients were coded as having complications. He said, "This is impossible; is insane." Now the feds have descended on Columbia for possible violations of law, bilking Medicare, buying and structuring doctors' practices, and paying for patient referrals. A Columbia spokesperson, Lindy Richardson said, "We think we are within the law. And if the law is incorrect, change the law." These are the same nice people who are looking for an opportunity to invest in hospitals in Hawaii.

Experience: A comb life gives you after you lose your hair.

A patient underwent a secondary open rhinoplasty and removal of chin implant. When she awakened, she noted severe pain in her right eye, and informed her plastic surgeon. He examined her sutures only, and allowed her to go home. The following day she continued to complain of pain in the eye. The surgeon referred the patient to an ophthalmologist who found a 40% central corneal epithelial defect. In the following months the patient continued to suffer periodic episodes of recurrent corneal epithelial erosion. She sued the surgeon and the anesthesiologist alleging malpractice for failing to properly tape her eyes closed during the operation. The initial trial court granted a summary judgment in favor of the doctors. However, the appellate court overruled noting that the surgeon admitted to the patient he thought her injury had been caused by inadequate lid closure during surgery.

Drinking makes such fools of people, and people are such fools to begin with, that it's compounding a felony.

Prior to June of this year, hospital emergency rooms in Hawaii were unintentionally viewed as safe havens for drunk drivers. Fearing confidentiality laws, ER docs would not reveal the blood alcohol level of patients, even when they were perceived as seriously impaired. High risk drivers were not being legally tested for alcohol in ERs, were not being prosecuted, did not lose their licenses and were not assessed for an alcohol problem. Now, thanks to Senate Bill 377, signed into law by Governor Cayetano on June 2nd, doctors have some latitude in identifying these problem drivers. Under this measure, medical personnel in ERs or other health facilities must release BAC information to law enforcement if a patient has been involved in a highway crash and is legally "under the influence" with a BAC of 0.08 or more. This practice will be limited to the person suspected of being the driver unless that information is not available. Grateful thanks go to testimony provided by Hawaii MADD (initiated by the HMA Auxiliary 14 years ago), the HMA, HEPA and others.

It's morally wrong to allow suckers to keep their money.

For the really bored airline traveler, Swissair is now the first major airline to allow in-flight gambling. Just slip your credit card into the slot, and the computer will record your winnings and losses. So far, the US Department of Transportation bans the practice in this country and on international flights to and from the United States.

Addenda—

- Average number of Americans who die each day from smoking-related illnesses: 1,145.
- Number of kids who become "regular" smokers each day: 3,000
- Average age kids start smoking: 13
- Average age kids start smoking: 13
- Number of U.S. children under age 18 today who are expected to die of smoking-related illnesses: 5 million.
- Smokiest television network: Fox with 2.67 smoking scenes an hour.
- Really big potential winners in the great tobacco settlement issue: attorneys, who if granted a mere 1% will divide nearly 4 billion dollars (and they expect 3%, or about $11 billion).
- Should we require a seven-day waiting period for having a child? Would it be called the Brady Bunch Bill?