Managed care sucks—There is no limit to how bad it can get.

The recent attempt by Hawaii Medical Service Association (HMSA) to force a profitable contract onto participating physicians was a flagrant effort to micro-manage medical care, override physician decisions, increase physician liability, neglect due process, and oblige acceptance of a handbook which HMSA could modify at will. The Hawaii Coalition for Medical Care, the Hawaii Medical Association, and the Hawaii Federation of Physicians and Dentists combined to alert the media and demand recall of the egregious document. A HMSA spokesman stated that the contract was only for discussion; an incredible explanation in view of the written threat that doctors must sign by January 1, 1998, or be decertified. Hats off and a resounding mahalo to pediatrician Arleen Myers MD who spearheaded the Coalition and provided the spark to ignite the joint effort. The lesson for organized medicine is that third parties who plan manipulative or abusive modifications in medical care, rarely respond to physicians’ complaints, but react promptly when the media and public become informed. It is all too obvious that doctors must speak together, speak loudly, and speak to the public.

It ain't braggin' if you can do it. Dizzy Dean.

What effect will the KeraVision Ring have on laser refractive surgery once the procedure is approved and marketed? A relatively inexpensive device for moderate degrees of myopia which produces reversible changes when the ring is removed, could have a major impact on high tech operations requiring expensive, complex lasers. Presumably, the ring can be inserted in any surgical setting. European investigations and U.S. phase II clinical studies are parallel with 97% achieving at least 20/40 acuity, and 47% of 113 patients had better than 20/20 vision. Present studies are limited to 3.5 diopters of refractive error with plans in phase III to go to 5 diopters.

I'm in favor of letting the status quo stay just as it is.

Legislators in Illinois recently attempted to provide the public with information on physicians’ malpractice and disciplinary histories. The bill would have made information available via a toll-free number. The current law allows such data for the confidential use of the state’s medical disciplinary board. The Illinois State Medical Society argued successfully that such a change would strip them of their confidentiality protections. Meanwhile, in Florida similar information went on the World Wide Web where some 5,300 downloads and 1,000 phone calls occurred in the first two days alone. Obviously, public interest is high, so our Hawaii Medical Association must keep a watchful eye on any similar proposals at the Legislature.

The difference between genius and stupidity is that genius has limits.

While the media is joyously dancing around the nursery of the seven McCaughhey newborns, (sensational news has been slow since the death of Diana) one has to wonder about the societal ethics of artificially generated multiple births in this obviously crowded world. The mother already had one child. Now we are graced with heartwarming daily stories of community largesse, including everything from a new home to a 12 passenger van, hourly television reports from the newborn intensive care unit, and a father, smiling broadly and talking about the “gifts from God.” But wait, you ask, where were the newspople and all the charitable donations last year when six babies (five survived) were born to a couple of slightly more skin pigmentation? And what about the prospects of retinopathy, mental retardation, and pulmonary disorders in these frail premies? And should we be celebrating?

How good are these compulsory air bags, anyway?

Over one year ago the federal government first proposed that auto owners be allowed to disconnect air bags. In the intervening year, 34 adults and children have been killed by air bags. Almost all of the drivers were short women and many were wearing seat belts, and the same was noted for the children. Safety advocates and the auto industry are pressuring to not permit owners to take out their air bags. The argument is that if the people disconnect them, many will die in crashes which they would have survived. When first proposed, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration claimed they would cut fatalities by 40%. In fact, available data reveal that the increased safety figure for a belted driver with an air bag is actually 9%. According to NHTSA figures a seat belt cuts the risk of dying by 42%, and an air bag bumps that figure up to only 47%. A study published in JAMA claimed that air bags kill more children than they save. Moreover, in the past six years, 49 children and infants have been killed by air bags in low-speed crashes that would otherwise have left them largely unharmed. 10% of front-seat child passengers who died in head-on crashes last year were actually killed by air bags. Therefore, the current rules for crash protection can be summarized as follows:—wear a seat belt—belt children in a rear seat—wrap 4000 lbs of Detroit steel around you—try not to be a short female.

Sometimes your best buys are the ones you don’t make.

Five mile per hour crashes are not much, one would think. In controlled testing, the Lincoln Continental had zero dollar damage to the front and $16 to the rear, but the Mercedes Benz E-420 suffered $372 to the front and $1066 in a rear collision test. The Lexus LS 400 front end repair at 5 MPH crash amounted to $748, so it is apparent that some luxury automakers favor style over crash performance.

To err is human, but when the eraser wears out before the pencil, you are overdoing it.

A mystery has occurred at the U.S. Treasury. Recent evaluation of tax coffers has shown an extra $46 billion beyond projections. The embarrassed bean counters cannot explain how this money, which largely accounts for the shrinking deficit, ended up in the Treasury! Deficit projections by the Congressional Budget Office (CB) in March estimated a figure of $124 billion, which has turned out to be an error of $101 billion! Supposedly, $55 billion of the windfall can be explained by a boom from the humming economy and a break from health cost inflation, but that still leaves $46 billion which the Treasury and the CBO cannot account for. Is this a none-time event or an ongoing increase in revenue? The answer will eventually emerge, possibly next summer, and the hunch is that it is related to the stock market. Back at the White House, the administration is taking bows for the smallest deficit since 1972.

Only change is permanent.

The medical financial crunch is being felt in the big apple where New York Medical Center and Mt. Sinai Medical Center will merge. The two elite institutions were supposed to combine last spring, but efforts have collapsed due to bickering between doctors. The trustees are pressing for the merger, stating that the advantages for the two hospitals are undeniable. The hostility generates from the passions of medical academia. The unity is supposed to involve only the two hospitals, and not the medical schools, but doctors at NYU fear this is the first step toward fusing their cherished medical school as well. They warn that NYU is about to be controlled by the “czar” of Mt. Sinai, Dr Jack Rowe. Trustee Laurence Tisch (once CEO of CBS) says, “Nonsense. There will always be an NYU Medical School.” However, the NYU physicians have formed an opposition group, raised $40,000 and plan to mount a legal campaign. Hell hath no fury like a professor who’s tenure is threatened.

A thing of beauty is a joy forever. Keats.

Every surgeon should know that barbers a century ago were much more versatile, and cutting hair was only one function. Many kinds of surgery were performed, and when the barbers finished, they hung blood soaked towels outside on a pole to dry. As the wind whipped the towels dry, they wrapped around the pole producing the striped pole design which remains to this day.

Addenda—

❖ Percentage of unplanned teenage pregnancies 60-70%; percentage of unplanned pregnancy in women on their 40’s 60-70%.
❖ Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you mad.
❖ Where do you get virgin wool? From dirty sheep.
❖ Aloha and Keep the faith.—rts