I Never Forget a Face, but in your case, I’ll be glad to make an exception.

That bureaucratic leviathan, the Health Care Financing Administration, continues to arbitrarily chop cataract surgery under the proposed rule of the federal budget act. Projections reveal that the average cataract reimbursement will drop from $929 in 1997 to $805 in 1998. Supposedly, there will be no net savings, but rather a redistribution of dollars to reflect a reimbursement shift from surgical specialties to primary care. The odious part of the changes is that they have no relevance to any parameters other than political perceptions, and the fact that cataract surgery is the most common (and successful) operation performed on the Medicare population. Moreover, one must wonder if primary care providers will receive any of the promised HCFA largesse.

There is no underestimating the intelligence of a political body.

In an unbelievable action, the Oklahoma Senate passed a bill permitting optometrists within the state to perform laser surgery. The legislation is designed to overturn a decision by an Oklahoma county District Court made last summer by District Judge Eugene Mathews. He ruled that optometrists could not perform laser surgery under the current abiding statute. The Oklahoma Academy of Ophthalmology (why not the Oklahoma Medical Association, also?) said the bill could seriously jeopardize the quality of eye care in the state and sets a dangerous precedent by lowering the standards of medical care. This issue involves eye care, but all of organized medicine must recognize this is not a turf battle, but redounds to every area of medical care involving the use of lasers.

A unit of blood is worth—a life; maybe your own.

A study reported in the journal Blood found that non-smoking men who donated a unit of blood in the preceding 3 years were half as likely to suffer a heart attack, stroke, or angina when compared with those who had never given blood. When blood iron is stored in high quantities, it is believed to trigger a series of vascular events which can lead to clogging of arteries. By donating blood, this likelihood is greatly reduced, so when the next blood drive is announced, or just any appropriate time, take an hour off to roll up your sleeve and give some of this most precious substance to the local blood bank.

It is all about power, friends!

Three years ago in California, a measure to restructure the California Medical Board from physician domination to lay-person majority, was defeated in committee. Backers of the measure believed that such restructure would lead to tougher scrutiny of health care providers. Now, a similar measure has been offered for restructure of the Podiatric Board, and it has a better chance of passing. Doctors groups are opposing the bill fearful that similar efforts would involve the Medical Board. And if California does eventually develop a lay-person dominated medical board, would our Legislature follow suit?

He wants a ticket to ride, but they don’t care. (Beesles, almost)

Should a professional golfer have to walk the course in order to compete? Casey Martin won the Nike Tour’s Lakeland Classic while riding in a golf cart. He has a rare circulation disease afflicting his right leg, and obtained a federal court order to let him ride in that competition. At the present time, PGA rules state that walking is a part of the game, and riding in a cart gives an unequivocal competitive advantage. Now Martin has won a suit against the PGA for a permanent "right to ride" under the Americans with Disability Act. The ADA was passed to prevent discrimination against the disabled in employment and public accommodations. To apply the ADA to competitive sport is quite a stretch, but hungry attorneys are perpetually creative. Is it appropriate for the courts to define rules for athletic associations?

These people are not your friends - C. Barkley

Another state legislature has added to the list of states granting patients access to physicians’ malpractice histories. In Washington state a resident need only call the state department of health during business hours to obtain the license status, number of open and closed complaints and disciplinary history of any physician licensed to practice medicine. Additionally, the department routinely sends out press releases relating disciplinary actions taken against errant doctors. They even identify doctors who have complaints filed against them which are still unresolved, and they provide a web page with the same information! Why not have a web page on each politician outlining attendance, voting record and history, educational background, all past and pending violations of law, vested interests, committees and attendance, family status, sexual preference, religious affiliation, etc., etc. Then we might understand where they are coming from.

Responsibility: Unto whomever much is given, of him shall much be required. (Luke 12:49)

Some managed care organizations, protected by the ERISA law, have made medical care decisions, but legally shifted responsibility to the doctor or nurse. Now legislation has been proposed to regulate managed health care, so that insurers and/or business organizations will be appropriately accountable. A political action group called The Health Benefits Coalition has unveiled a print ad featuring a picture of Frankenstein, “Be Careful How You Play Doctor. You Might Mandate a Monster.” The aim of the ad is to defeat proposals regulating managed health care, with the claim that the measures could increase premiums and cause millions of Americans to lose their insurance. However, David Herbert, chairman of a coalition of patient-advocacy groups disputed the arguments. He noted that Medicare managed-care plans already had similar consumer protections enacted in last year’s budget law. Moreover, a recent Kaiser Foundation-Harvard University public poll found that 88% said they favored a law requiring health plans to permit appeals to an independent reviewer.

Socialism relieves us of the necessity of living for others.

Under the President’s latest proposal, Americans age 62 to 64 would be able to join Medicare, and also he would include those 55 to 61 who have lost their jobs. Looking at the predicted Social Security shortfall, Senator Phil Gramm said, “If your mother is on the Titanic and the Titanic is sinking, the last thing on earth you want to be preoccupied with is getting more passengers on the ship.”

The machine is slipping from our hands as if someone else were steering.

A physician failed to diagnose a cancerous tumor, and the patient brought a malpractice suit. The initial complaint was in excess of his policy limit, but the patient agreed to settle for the limit. Wishing to avoid the stress and adverse media attention, the doctor requested that the insurer settle the complaint. The insurance company refused, and took the case to trial where a verdict was returned against the doctor in excess of his policy limit. The insurer intervened and obtained a settlement for the limit of the doctor’s policy, but the physician brought suit against the carrier for bad-faith action for loss of property and emotional distress. The insurer maintained that a suit could not be brought except for pecuniary losses arising from excess liability. The trial court disagreed and said the case could proceed to trial.

The income tax has made more liars than golf has.

Further evidence that golfers are eccentric, comes from Ireland where a golfer developed hepatitis. Doctors were struggling for the source of his disease until he admitted that he licked his golf balls while playing through each daily round. It was his theory that “a clean ball is a faster ball.” After determining what pesticide was used on the golf course, doctors surmise that the best guess is that the patient developed his liver inflammation from a weedkiller sprayed on the course. As for others likely to be on the fairway, bear in mind that the pesticide is still being used, so refrain from licking your balls.

Addenda—

- Loss of one eye will reduce the visual field by approximately 20% (depending on size of nose).
- America’s first minimum wage, in 1938, was 25 cents an hour.

Aloha and keep the faith.—rts