It is easy to get along with the Hawaii Supreme Court - if you're fond of children.

As all physicians know, medical liability is already a calamitous crazy-quilt of medical-legal-bureaucratic mine fields. Now the Hawaii Supreme Court in a preposterous decision, has decided that a doctor cannot refer a patient to a consultant for care without providing informed consent for the care provided by that consultant. A Honolulu orthodontist referred a patient to an oral surgeon who could have given a second opinion, but instead elected to operate. The surgery allegedly resulted in facial asymmetry, and neck, back and shoulder pain. The surgeon agreed to a financial settlement, but the plaintiff also sued the orthodontist for lack of informed consent. The Hawaii Supreme Court ruled that the orthodontist was obligated to provide informed consent for the patient prior to referral. Well, why not sue the brother-in-law who first recommended the orthodontist? Almost every day we are reminded that Americans are prisoners of a legal system that ignores logic and is deplorably out of control.

A good politician is about as unthink alike as an honest burglar.

Politicians and bureaucrats simply do not understand the power, dangers and injury potential of the laser. The Veterans' Health Administration's current optometry guidelines permit O.D.s to perform laser and other eye surgeries and to prescribe systemic drugs. The American Academy of Ophthalmology has mobilized in opposition and stimulated grass roots and congressional pressure to rescind the document and develop an appropriate manual for eye care. An even greater sin occurred in Oklahoma where the governor signed into law a bill permitting optometrists to use lasers. Organized ophthalmology tried in vain to educate the politicians, but were unable to stem the well-heeled lobbying forces of optometry. Where was the AMA in the lobbying effort? Rockless latitude in the use of lasers is a challenge for all of medicine, and this egregious Oklahoma law represents a giant step forward for pretenders. Naturopaths, chiropractors, cosmetologists, and even hair stylists, will soon petition for rights to use laser therapy.

Bad news does not improve with age.

As our elderly population increases, eye specialists are becoming an ever greater means of protection for the highway public. With the visual acuity loss of cataract glare, the reduced discrimination of macular degeneration, the field loss of glaucoma and stroke, and the dementia of Alzheimer's, elderly drivers are an ever greater risk on the highways. Many of these people plan their driving to avoid heavy traffic, long distances, bad weather and night driving, but the increased risk remains. To expect this population to self-regulate is not a realistic approach. A recent study in JAMA reported that drivers with a loss of 40% or more of visual field are 2.2 times more likely to have a crash. For the doctor, difficulties frequently arise when the patient is informed that his/her driving days have ended. To most people, the automobile is more than a means of transportation, it is also a major part of one's freedom. Loss of the car keys may precipitate a serious confrontation, and that is when our persuasive abilities may be severely challenged.

Don't make love to a stranger.

The federal government through the Center of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Health Resources and Service Administration (HRSA) have collaborated with the San Francisco Department of Public Health to establish a toll-free hot line to help doctors treat health-care workers who have been exposed to blood borne disease and infection by needle-stick injuries. It is called the Post-Exposure Prophylaxis Hotline (PEP) and is manned 24 hours each day by physicians. It can be accessed from anywhere in the United States by dialing (write this down, now) 888-448-4911.

Where is Jimmy Hoffa when we need him?

In New Jersey, a group of physicians working in an HMO called AmeriHealth petitioned to be represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers union in contract negotiations. The regional director, Dorothy Moore-Duncan, an official of the National Labor Relations Board, ruled that the doctors didn't meet the definition of employees under the NLRA act. Because the doctors treat patients who aren't members of the HMO, and the practices are virtually all professional corporations, and because they control their own expenses, they retain the characteristics of independent businessmen. Collective bargaining remains outside the medical realm, and doctors must individually bend over for the juggernaut insurers and employers.

To live or let die? And I don't mean 007.

Yet another malpractice hazard is the alleged failure to let the patient die, contrary to his/her wishes. A 67-year-old retired meteorologist had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, and supplied his doctor with a power of attorney, do not resuscitate (DNR) directive. He stated that he did not want to be kept alive by a respirator, and his pulmonologist had arranged for hospice care. However, when he began to gasp for breath, an aide called 911, and he was taken to the emergency room where he requested a tracheotomy. After discharge, he wrote a letter of thanks to the doctor saying, "I am much more a fighter for life than I imagined." Later, the doctor was stunned when he was sued for keeping the patient alive against his wishes! The plaintiff's attorney and the media played it up as ignoring a patient's wish to "die with dignity" case, when in fact it was a "patient changed his mind" case. The jury supported the doctor, but his reputation was publicly smeared. A study in the Journal of American Geriatrics Society revealed that of 688 written advance directives, only 22 were specific enough to guide physicians' decisions in whether to use life-extending treatment in the actual situation. Moreover, it was found that only about one-third had even mentioned the directives to their doctors.

The knowledge of courtesy and good manners begets liking, and an inclination to love one another.

The powers in charge of managed care plans, mainly HMOs, are sending their doctors to "communications school." Patient-satisfaction surveys have uncovered widespread resentment over brusque, rude or indifferent doctors. As a result, about 19,000 U.S. doctors, including Kaiser Permanente, PacificCare Health Systems, Group Health of Minneapolis and Harvard Pilgrim Health Care of New England, have been sent to workshops primarily to learn how to listen, and to be courteous, kind and decent human beings (Civility 101?). One would assume that these qualities are inherent in the definition of physician, but the assembly line techniques of the HMO do not encourage a caring doctor-patient relationship.

If everything seems to be going well, you have overlooked something.

Serendipity is a word which crept into our lexicon via a fairy tale. Yet it is a good word and useful in describing the faculty of fortunate, valuable and unexpected outcomes, occurring by accident. Pfizer Inc. developed a drug designed to combat heart disease, and labeled it Viagra. After seven clinical trials on numerous test subjects, the researchers conceded that the drug was a failure. The program was about to be permanently trashed when the scientists observed something quite unexpected. Test subjects told doctors they experienced more frequent, longer lasting, and more tumescent erections. Many of these people plan their driving to avoid heavy traffic, long distances, bad weather and night driving, but the increased risk remains. To expect this population to self-regulate is not a realistic approach. A recent study in JAMA reported that drivers with a loss of 40% or more of visual field are 2.2 times more likely to have a crash. For the doctor, difficulties frequently arise when the patient is informed that his/her driving days have ended. To most people, the automobile is more than a means of transportation, it is also a major part of one's freedom. Loss of the car keys may precipitate a serious confrontation, and that is when our persuasive abilities may be severely challenged.

Addenda—
- The IRS is currently holding 96,000 tax refunds worth $62 million in unclaimed dollars.
- Number of cows needed to supply footballs for a single NFL season: 3,000
- Should vegetarians eat animal crackers? Can fat people go skinny-dipping?

Addenda—
- The IRS is currently holding 96,000 tax refunds worth $62 million in unclaimed dollars.
- Number of cows needed to supply footballs for a single NFL season: 3,000
- Should vegetarians eat animal crackers? Can fat people go skinny-dipping?

Addenda—
- The IRS is currently holding 96,000 tax refunds worth $62 million in unclaimed dollars.
- Number of cows needed to supply footballs for a single NFL season: 3,000
- Should vegetarians eat animal crackers? Can fat people go skinny-dipping?