Meanwhile, the "top" hospitals rushed to promote themselves in what is a competitive market, keeping faith with their patients. Aloha and keep the faith — RTSU.

It is alleged that statistics are caused by watching your dog defecate.

Change is inevitable, except from vending machines.

"Top 100 Hospitals," by measuring financial performance. The ranked hospitals actually refer to a pigment used by fine artists, found in clay regions of India. The National Congress of American Indians had not established "co-management" agreements with optometrists or ophthalmologists whereby the co-managing doctor is paid significantly more than the 80/20 split typically allowed under Medicare global fee rules. Most refractive surgeons assume that the Stark II and anti-kickback laws do not apply since the arrangements are not reimbursed by Medicare or Medicaid. However, if the Dept. of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General feels that the lucrative referral share produces a stream of common or other Medicare referrals to the refractive surgeon, then the over-market fee split may be treated as an illegal kickback and not legitimate co-management. And still another area of vulnerability is the malpractice threat when the co-manager may not be competent regarding possible injuries related to the surgery. Some members of the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery are concerned about the exorbitant kickback fees, but any open discussion about co-management fees could be interpreted as price fixing. In a nearly forgotten medical world, doctors were concerned only with patient care and professionalism.

Delay Is The Deadliest Form Of Denial.

In Britain, Prime Minister Tony Blair's government may fall due to a breakdown in their beloved National Health Service. A 73-year-old female patient with throat cancer needed prompt surgery to remove the malignant growth, but the procedure was postponed four times over five weeks due to a lack of beds. By the time space was available, the tumor had spread, and the case was no longer operable. The public was outraged as the media highlighted the system's failure, and the inability to cope with the annual outbreak of influenza which stretched the hospitals. The U.K. spends about 8% of its GDP on healthcare, compared with America's 14%, although many medical expenses in the U.S. are considered social in Britain.

Now, Mr. Blair says that an increase in the small but growing private care would solve the NHS's difficulties. Contrarily, across the Atlantic our government is doing its best to destroy our cherished private sector of medicine. Go figure.

The Possession Of Power Inevitably Spoils The Free Use Of Reason.

Cataract surgery is easily the most common operation for Medicare patients, and those wonderful people at HCFA are constantly searching for ways to reduce costs. Suggestions have been made that monitored anesthesia is not necessary for cataract surgery, because the operation has evolved into a very safe and predictable procedure. Not so! A study of over 1000 consecutive cataract operations by Rosenfeld et al., found that patients under 60 required intervention 61% of the time while those older than age 60 needed intervention 36.5% of the cases. The operative risk could not be predicted, but obviously an older population, often with a history of heart, pulmonary, renal, vascular or other systemic condition, is fragile. Intervention varied from physical restraint and respiratory assurance to simple verbal assurance.

Experience Is A Good Teacher, But He Sends Terrific Bills.

Harvard Pilgrim, a nonprofit HMO that has consistently been rated near the top in quality of medical care, was placed under Massachusetts state receivership as a result of spiraling losses and errors in accounting. Rising medical and drug costs plus heavy price competition among HMOs and insurers produced losses. Original figures were about $100 million, but were actually found to be from $150 to $177 million. The losses also had the effect of squeezing a $147 million state bond issue that had been scheduled. The state planned to sell the bonds to private investors and use the money to buy five of the HMO's buildings and lease them back.

Quicker And Sicker - 'Em Up! Head 'Em Out!

Bean counters at health care consulting firms HCIA Inc. of Baltimore and William M. Mercer, Inc. of New York came up with a stupid, stupid list of "Top 100 Hospitals," by measuring financial performance. The ranked hospitals showed significantly shorter lengths of stay, lower in-hospital costs and lower rates of re-admission within 180 days (the patients probably died) for cardiac patients. However, analysts found that there was no significant difference in quality of care compared with un-ranked hospitals. Meanwhile, the "top" hospitals rushed to promote themselves in what is a public relations bonanza for attracting customers and bargaining with managed-care organizations. At the same time, U.S. News and World Report published another well-regarded hospital ranking, scoring patient care exclusively, evaluating mortality rates, available technology, and nurses-to-beds ratio. Johns Hopkins Hospital and Mayo Clinic were among their top hospitals.

It Is Worse Than A Crime. It Is A Blunder.

In Florida, patients who are planning a malpractice suit against a physician must notify the Department of Health of their intention. The DOH wants to make the information publicly available when the complaint is received. Previously, the state only made the complaint public after an investigation found probable cause or after the suit had actually been filed. The Florida Medical Association and Osteopathic Association were unsuccessful in obtaining a temporary injunction. The state attorney general said there was no violation of law, so tough luck, Doc. "The information would unfairly identify physicians who may be threatened with frivolous and unfounded lawsuits," according to their request. Any disgruntled patient can make an unwarranted complaint and the Florida Department of Health will announce it to the media. Lucky you live Hawaii.


In these days of reduced physician income, HMO manipulations, struggles to confront insurance goolias, and abiding and often abusive government inference, a stupid display of ostentatious wealth surely doesn't help the doctor's image. In Barrington, a Chicago suburb, a husband and wife doctor couple paid $180,000 cash for a home for their high school student son to park his 1999 Honda in the driveway near the school. Work on the school parking lot had created a shortage of space. Buying a parking place for your high school child's car is not uncommon in Chicago's suburbs, but this episode went beyond the pale. How can physicians expect any sympathy for declining income, and loss of medical control when episodes like this get nationwide publicity?

Excuse For The Millennium - "The Check Is In The E-Mail."

E-mail medicine (cybercare?) is only in embryo, but the virtual house call is going to be part of more practices in the not distant future. A patient can pluck the finger, squeeze a drop of blood onto a glucose meter about the size of a floppy disk, hook up the meter to the computer and click it off to the doctor's lab for analysis and medical direction. It is happening today in silicon valley, and such exams take place daily at DiabetesWell.com which treats over 700 patients across the U.S. In addition, many web sites already have shaken up medical care by giving patients access to great amounts of material, some legitimate and a lot of it fanciful. Bearing this information in mind, the Inference, as a stupiddisplay of ostentatious wealth surely doesn't help the doctor's image. In Barrington, a Chicago suburb, a husband and wife doctor couple paid $180,000 cash for a home for their high school student son to park his 1999 Honda in the driveway near the school. Work on the school parking lot had created a shortage of space. Buying a parking place for your high school child's car is not uncommon in Chicago's suburbs, but this episode went beyond the pale. How can physicians expect any sympathy for declining income, and loss of medical control when episodes like this get nationwide publicity?

Deja Moo: The Feeling That You've Heard This Bull Before.

Political correctness has hit the box of Crayolas. Binnie & Smith, Inc., makers of Indian red crayons, is changing the name of the reddish-brown hue after teachers complained that many children (or is it the teacher?) think the color refers to the skin color of Native Americans. Wrong! In fact the name actually refers to a pigment used by fine artists, found in clay regions of India. The National Congress of American Indians had not complained about the color, however they applauded the increased sensitivity "to images and symbols which have been perceived as offensive to Native Americans." Please give me a break, non-gender, non-racial, non-sexually-oriented, chairperson.

ADDENDA

From 1987 to 1996, the number of women smokers of child-bearing age, dropped from 16.3% to 11.8%.

Since 1979, eighteen American amateur soccer players have been killed by falling goalposts.

46% of U.S. women "wish they could do something about their thighs."

Change is inevitable, except from vending machines.

It is alleged that sties are caused by watching your dog defecate. Aloha and keep the faith — RTSU.  

The Weathervane  Russell T. Stodd MD