Our Deeds Determine Us, As Much As We Determine Our Deeds.

The passing of William Dang, Sr. M.D. marks a great loss to the medical profession and the Hawaii Medical Association. A true gentleman, a wise and kind father with an extraordinary medical progeny, and a proud past president of Hawaii Medical Association, Bill was instrumental in bringing affordable medical liability insurance to Hawaii’s physicians during the insurance crisis of the 1970s. As costs skyrocketed and virtually all underwriters vacated Hawaii, Dr. Dang and HMA Executive Vice-president Jonathon Won, convinced a then new physicians mutual, Medical Insurance Exchange of California (MIEC), to come to our rescue. Since then, MIEC has grown into a very strong organization, protects about 1150 practicing physicians in Hawaii, supports the HMA in multiple areas, and has provided excellent malpractice protection with very competitive premium rates. For this alone, and many other reasons, we all owe Bill Dang. We benefit from his legacy and treasure his memory.

Too Many Clowns And Not Enough Circuses.

The United States Army recorded the incidence of hospitalized ocular injuries over a 10 year period ending in 1995. Because the personnel who sustain eye injuries frequently become unfit for military service, the economic cost can be enormous. The highest rate of injury was in 17 to 19 year olds, and males were twice as likely as females to be injured. The annual rate was 77 per 100,000, and the rate decreased by 38% over the 10 year period. Interestingly, the great majority of injuries were not related to weaponry nor war. 21% were caused by machinery or tools, 18% due to fights, 18% transport injuries, 11% sports or training, and a mere 7% due to weaponry or acts of war (90% of those were non-battle activities). The outcome of the collection of data suggests that appropriate preventive measures would be useful in decreasing the incidence of ocular trauma. Should the army go sailing on the OSHA?

Computers May Reduce Man’s Limbs To Push-Button digits.

Robotic surgery is here. The Food and Drug Administration has approved the da Vinci system for minimally invasive surgery, and it is now being marketed by Intuitive Surgery, Inc., of Mountain View, California. Through a one centimeter incision, the surgeon controls the robotic arms which are viewed on a 3-D video screen and controlled with joysticks and foot pedals equipped with sensors to manipulate the instruments. The FDA said the safety and effectiveness of the new device is about the same as laparoscopy. Going a step beyond, the device mimics the dexterity of human hands, and the fine movements such as sutting and dissection are easier than with laparoscopy. Currently under testing in several hospitals for cardiac surgery, the device is expected to be useful in a broad array of surgeries. Who knows? If silicon valley has its way, many surgical procedures may be programmed onto floppy discs, and the entire operation can be performed by computer.

You Never Really Learn To Swear Until You Learn To Drive.

To avoid sitting in traffic jams, more commuters are opting for bicycles. Bike riders like the exercise and environmental friendliness offered by two-wielders, not to mention the ability to whip past stalled traffic. As a result, the number of people biking to work has grown more than 20% in the last five years, to 7 million, and some businesses are offering lockers, showers and other bike-friendly facilities. The downside is that many motorists are loath to get stuck behind slower-moving bicyclers, and clashes between the two are rising in number and violence. For people ages 25 to 64, cycle-related fatalities have risen almost 30% in the last five years. Drivers throw beer or soda cans, cut bikers off and have even hit bikers. The cyclists are not innocent. They often ride on sidewalks, go the wrong way on one way streets, ignore stop signs, or traffic control signals, and sometimes throw objects at motorists. Caught in the middle are the police who must referee the sniping and bickering. At the root of the problem is the increased number of motor vehicles and the frequent traffic jams so many hours of the day in busy cities like Honolulu. Be careful out there.


The World Health Organization estimates that over one million children under age 15 in sub-Saharan Africa are living with HIV/AIDS, and the vast majority probably contracted the virus while breast feeding from their mothers. In the 1970s public health advocates fought a ferocious battle with infant-formula makers. They charged that marketing methods induced poor women to rely heavily on formulas and many women used contaminated water or diluted the formulas, causing a serious threat to the health of babies. They vigorously pushed breast feeding. Now, in the heat of the AIDS pandemic, experts are saying that evidence strongly suggests that infant formula should be aggressively promoted. Drugs can block the transmission of the virus, but obtaining the medicine and getting it to the infected mother in proper time is another obstacle.

Injustice Is Relatively Easy To Bear; What Stings Is Justice.

The question of why a doctor gets sued is one every physician should keep in mind. The number one protection against a malpractice suit is the doctor-patient relationship. It is an established truth that many times when the doctor has committed a negligent act, the patient will refuse to file a complaint because of a genuine affection and respect for the doctor. Moreover, patients understand that bad results can occur, and are willing to accept that, if the doctor takes the time to present the problem and explain the bad result. The second point is doctor arrogance. Malpractice attorneys are delighted when they encounter an arrogant physician (usually a surgeon, and usually male) at deposition, because they know the jury won’t like the doctor. Even if there is no negligence, defense attorneys are inclined to settle a case when they find it difficult to “humanize” the doctor. Another major concern in malpractice cases occurs when the doctor is caught in a lie, even if there is no negligence. This is called an incendiary device, and trial lawyers love them. Juries are not stupid, and do not like liars. And always remember to write your medical records as if a malpractice attorney were going to read them, because perhaps one will.

We Live And Learn, But Grow No Wiser.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has advanced new air bag rules. The new regulations encompass testing and deployment of the advanced air bags, which employ better sensors and controls than older, sometimes dangerous bags. The new rules require manufacturers to test air bags on unrestrained dummies of small women and children ages 1, 3, and 6. The original crash tests were conducted on average-sized male dummies, which caused some serious injuries and sometimes even death to small human beings. The advanced air bags will be gradually implemented beginning in September 2003 and continuing through August 2006. Manufacturers must reduce risk by installing automatic switches or sensors that detect the size of occupants and deactivate bags or adjust the force of inflation accordingly.

Man (And Woman) Is So Constituted That No Matter What Color You Are Everyone Requires About The Same Amount Of Food.

Who said life was fair? A comfortable suburban 2200 sq. ft. house with four bedrooms and 2 1/2 baths in Jackson, Mississippi, is valued at $126,500. The same house in San Jose, California, is valued at $708,600, while in Honolulu it would be valued at $372,700 (if you can find one). A gallon of milk on Maui costs $4.39, while in San Antonio the cost is $2.28. Figure in other items such as foodstuffs, taxes, transportation, utilities, and cost of doing business, and one can see why living in our island paradise means accepting a reduction in discretionary income.

ADDENDA

✦ 95% of food poisoning cases are never reported.
✦ Nearly 50% of bank robberies take place on Friday. Week-end party?
✦ Does the little mermaid wear an algebra?

Aloha and keep the faith —rs

Contents of this column do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of the Hawaii Ophthalmological Society. Editorial comment is strictly that of the writer.