Are There Any Herbal Suppositories?

Ginkgo biloba is a popular over-the-counter herbal compound that is recommended to treat depression, dementia, peripheral vascular disease, age-related memory impairment, and anxiety. Interesting for eye surgeons, is that ginkgo biloba when used with aspirin, has caused anterior chamber hemorrhage. Now, a controlled study reported in Lancet involving 214 elderly patients followed over a period of 24 weeks, failed to find any benefit of Ginkgo biloba extracts in therapy for age-related memory impairment or dementia. This has caused some confusion because previous clinical trials showed a small but measurable beneficial effect on memory function. Experts postulate that the explanation is that the latest study used a suitable placebo which was able to mimic the pronounced taste and smell of ginkgo, and yielded a more accurate double masked study.

Always Watch Your Step, Even If You Are Not Going Anywhere.

To date, 42 states and the District of Columbia post their medical disciplinary actions on their web sites. Three other states are in the process of following suit. Only five states, Hawaii, Wyoming, South Dakota, Alaska, and Montana say they have no plans to electronically disclose the actions taken regarding errant physicians. Washington based Public Citizen says patients should be able to retrieve data by entering a physician’s name and/or license number in a search engine. “Adequate information” would include the doctor’s name, the offense committed, a summary of the misconduct, the disciplinary action taken and even a full text of the board order. Public Citizen also wants the web site to make available all actions taken within the past 10 years, monthly updates of each board meeting, a listing even after a physician’s license is suspended, revoked or expired. Data would be deleted only if a physician is exonerated or a court overrules the board’s action. So far, only two states, Maryland and Arizona, received an A grade from Public Citizen. Twenty-four states boards got a B, and four received an F. Ah, the wonders of our electronic age. If you still live in that dream world about your right of privacy – forget it!

The Most Dangerous Animal On Wall Street Is The Bum Steer.

Visx Inc. was flying high in 1999 when its stock was over $100 a share, but since then the stock has tumbled. The sagging economy, competition, and warnings about rare but permanent injuries resulting from lasik procedures have slowed the patient flow. With the announcement that 2000 fourth quarter earnings fell below expectations, Visx stock has descended an additional 25% to $9.31. Bausch & Lomb, Inc. also announced that its fiscal fourth quarter earnings fell below forecasts with the falling demand for surgery. At the same time a number of operators of lasik surgery chains jumped into the market, falling over each other to offer discount rates of $999 for both eyes as an introductory plan. As a result of growing reports about botched procedures, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration posted a warning to consumers to beware of slick advertising and surgical deals that sound to good to be true. Lola Wood, a spokeswoman for Visx, said “This is an industry in turmoil.” Clearly, there still is a lot of shaking down before the technology, the equipment, the manufacturers, the promoters, and the doctors arrive at stability.

Everybody’s Upset About Something.

Possibly the biggest issue the AMA House of Delegates could find to discuss at the December meeting is the “morning after” pill. The House voted to recommend that pharmacists be allowed to dispense the drug over the counter. At issue is the time factor. The patient may not have an opportunity to get an appointment with her doctor before too much time has passed. Specifically, the pill is not an abortive, but does prevent fertilization, therefore as in so many other things in life, timing is important. Of course, what the vote also means is that doctors are signing on to legalize the practice of medicine by pharmacists – something the druggists are often ready to do anyway.

One Should Forgive One’s Enemies, But Not Before They Are Hanged.

After a seven year investigation precipitated by whistleblowers, the government has settled a criminal fraud complaint with Columbia-HCA Healthcare Corp. over Medicare billing to the tune of $92 million. The settlement comes on top of a $745 million civil claims settlement last May in regard to fraudulent billing practices. So far, the big corporate cheaters can sleep well, because no individuals were named, although Attorney General Janet Reno said that could happen. I doubt it. The really big muckracks are very careful about the CYA game. Besides, it is a lot easier for the fraud team or attorney general to prosecute a small practitioner for careless coding, bookkeeping, or lack of documentation, than to sort out the big time cheats at Columbia.

Progress Is Made On Alternative Fridays.

Using light to cure illness is as old as mankind, since even our troglodyte ancestors knew that getting out into the sunshine was beneficial. LEDs (light emitting diodes) were originally designed for commercial plant growth research in space. Professor Harry Whelan, M.D. and some clever doctors at the Medical College of Wisconsin decided to try the same device to assist wound healing. The treatment is quick and painless. In a hospital trial on children with cancer-related oral ulcers, a small 9 by 11 centimeter box with an array of LEDs, was placed outside of the patient’s cheek for one minute each day. The red light penetrated the oral cavity, promoted wound healing, and prevented further ulceration. Remarkably, the near-infrared light emitted by the LEDs seems to be perfect for increasing energy inside cells. Dr. Whelan, a U.S. Navy Reserve Commander, working with doctors at Navy Special Warfare Command centers, expanded the wound healing study. An LED device was used on men aboard an attack submarine, and reduced laceration healing time by half, and a 40% improvement was recorded in musculo-skeletal training injuries when treated with light-emitting diodes. At Wisconsin, the schedule is to continue the research for 18 months on 100 patients. A remarkable aside is that whether you are on dry land, in a submarine, or in a space ship, the LEDs will function to boost cellular energy and accelerate healing.

You Can Never Do Just One Thing.

The Arizona legislature wanted to encourage the purchase of environmentally friendly electric cars by allowing a $10,000 tax credit. Being priced at about $40,000, the electric vehicles are considerably more expensive than the standard family sedan. However in their eagerness, law makers created a loop hole for the golf cart which can be modified with headlights, brake lights, mirrors and a windshield at a total cost of about $6,500, and still meet the legal definition. Golfers can zip from the carport to the links, enjoy a round with other duffers, and cruise back home. Along the way they can savour a generous stop at the nineteenth hole, complements of a generous state $10,000 kickback.

Dogs Lead A Nice Life. You Never See A Dog With A Cell Phone.

A recent JAMA article provided a study of cellphones and found no evidence that the devices cause brain cancer in people who had used them for an average of less than three years. The finding of a rare type of brain cancer was not statistically significant. No data were presented addressing the issue of long term use. More interesting would be a detailed study about motor vehicle crashes and cellphones, since auto accident numbers related to their use are roughly parallel to those of driving under the influence of alcohol.

ADDENDA

- American efficiency - September 17, 1890, the first person was executed in the electric chair.
- The flu was first described in 412 B.C. by Hippocrates.
- 25% of all murder victims are killed by a relative.
- How many chiropractors does it take to change a light bulb? One, but it takes him six visits.
- The Ku Klux Klan has never produced any great composers.

Aloha and keep the faith — rts

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.