In Life And Medicine, It's What You Haven't Done That Matters.
A 72 year old man fell off a curb while heading toward his car and fractured his hip after leaving the ophthalmologist’s office. In a subsequent law suit, the attorney for the patient cited the Physicians Desk Reference, and claimed that the doctor failed to meet the standard of care by not providing dark glasses, and that caused the patient’s injury. The PDR advises doctors who prescribe dilating drops to instruct patients to wear dark glasses, and avoid driving or operating dangerous machinery after the eyes are dilated. The doctor stated that his staff routinely advises patients about light sensitivity and blurred vision along with dilating drops, and offers the patient dark glasses before leaving the office. However, the patient did not request them, and no documentation was made in the record that the dark glasses were offered. Considering the above, the defense group felt it would be difficult to defend, the case was settled, and the doctor went into the data bank where they make deposits but not withdrawals.

Elsie! Please Use The Container. It Was The Herd Shot Round The World.
An exciting development to aid in the diagnosis of “mad cow disease” has been claimed by Israeli scientists. A urine test will detect the renegade proteins, called prions, which are believed to cause the disease. Scientists claim the test is straightforward, and can be quickly confirmed. At the present time the only method of diagnosis is at autopsy where the spongiform encephalopathy is evident. In Britain, about 100 people have died from the human variant, Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease. Researchers have been desperate to find a simple diagnostic test in order to save cattle herds when an infected animal is discovered. Investigators have been able to detect the condition with 95% accuracy in a double blind test performed on 52 British cows. It has not been proven that the condition can be transmitted with blood, but restrictions have been imposed. The test could help safeguard the blood supply also, much of which is exported from Europe to the U. S.

Money May Be The Root Of All Evil, But The Stem Is Okay.
Although doctors have used stem cells to grow skin for grafting burn patients and new cartilage to repair damaged knees, now a technique has been found to replace complex corneal tissue in the human eye. Researchers have taken undamaged limbal stem cells and grown them on amniotic membrane medium for several weeks, and then transplanted them on corneas scarred from Stevens-Johnson syndrome, lye burns, or pemphigus. Success rate has been from 70 to 80% with vision restored to 20/40 in some cases in initial studies done at Univ. California at Davis. At six months follow up, there were no cases of recurring inflammation.

If Heaven Went By Merit, Man Would Stay Out, And His Dog Would Go In.
In 1965, when the Medicare law went into action, Christian Science healing centers were part of the legislative act. In 1996 a group critical of faith healing, Children’s Healthcare Is A Legal Duty (CHILD), brought a lawsuit challenging the statute as a breech of separation of church and state. The journal Pediatrics found 172 deaths of children deprived of medical care where 140 of those had at least a 90% chance of survival with proper medical or surgical care. The AMA filed friend-of-the-court briefs in support of the suit. Congress responded with a new definition - RNHCI - “religious non-medical health care institutions” which fits the 20 Christian Science centers like partynose. An appeal court’s majority found the new definition a “permissible accommodation of religion.” The Supreme Court, without comment, simply let the lower court ruling stand, and therefore, federal spending on faith healing will continue. The potential for sharp differences in interpretation were clearly stated by the dissenting opinion, “The basic deficiency of the majority opinion is that it upholds the constitutionality of a statute which provides a government benefit solely to religious institutions. I am aware of no other decision in the United States which has upheld such a program.”

Bend Over And Spread Your —
Colon cancer is the second-deadliest malignancy and will claim 56,200 lives this year. The old standard mechanism of occult blood and sigmoidoscopy is now believed to fail 24% of the time in detecting colon cancer. A recent study in the New England Journal of Medicine claimed that occult blood test alone is effective between 1/3 and 1/2 of the time, while sigmoidoscopy alone is effective 70% of the time. The NEJM government funded study analyzed data from 2885 patients aged 50 to 75 at hospitals across the country. Insurers generally encourage doctors to annually screen those over 50 by one of the two cheaper methods. Editorializing, the NEJM states that doctors should recommend colonoscopy as the standard. It is more expensive, but significantly more useful in detecting serious disease.

GOT NO INCOME? We Don't Care! GOT NO COLLATERAL? We Don't Care! CAN'T PAY US? Now We Care!
As published in the Pacific Business News, it is old news that Hawaii Medical Services Association agreed to guarantee a loan of 55 million to a Hawaii medical group. Unable to obtain the loan without serious difficulties, the group prevailed on HMSA, and that generous “mutual” decided to offer support. When the attorney general, Mr. Anzai, was asked about the legality of “mutual” reserves being pledged in this matter, he declined to reply, and punted the question to our insurance commissioner. When Mr. Metcalf was asked if any such arrangement affecting the balance of medical competition in the community would be worthy of investigation, Mr. Metcalf stated it definitely would. However, when obliged to respond in writing, Mr. Metcalf said he has no jurisdiction over the “mutual” and any action from his office would have to come through legislative fiat. Does doubt remain in anyone’s mind that our all-dominant “mutual” is in complete control?

Most People Are Not Particularly Good At Anything.
In Philadelphia, a motorist was cited for driving under the influence when he ran into a bicyclist. The arresting officer stated that the driver smelled of alcohol, slurred his speech and had glassy eyes. At trial, the attorney for the accused stated that he wanted to explain the “glassy” eyes appearance by removing the defendant’s prosthetic eye. The judge looked into the orbit and stated that the attorney missed the point in that both eyes were described as “glassy.” He sentenced the driver to 90 days for DUI and reckless endangerment. The driver could have replied, “I’ll keep an eye out for you.”

Trespassers In The Repair Shop Will Be Ultra-Violated.
A husband and wife worked for the Indiana Department of Transportation in the maintenance department. They had the same foreman, who claimed to be bisexual. He harassed both of them with inappropriate touching, groping, caressing, urging sexual favors and suggestive speech. They sued the state of Indiana under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act which bans discrimination on the basis of sex. The supreme court ruled that because the accused foreman was bisexual and treated both sexes the same, even though the behavior was inappropriate and naughty, that there could be no discrimination under title VII. The state was not liable for any damages.

Hey, Lady, Your Freudian Slip Is Showing!
Betsy Gothaum, past President of the New York Historical Society had the honor of introducing the illustrious speaker at the Society’s fund raiser. She introduced former President William Jefferson Clinton as Richard Nixon!

ADDENDA
• 30,000 Americans die each year from firearms; 1/2 of them are suicides.
• I wish the buck stopped here, because I am really short right now.
• I was lost in thought - it was unfamiliar territory.
Aloha and keep the faith —

Contents of this column do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of the Hawaii Ophthalmological Society and the Hawaii Medical Association. Editorial comments are strictly that of the writer.