Where Were The Animal Rights People When Joe Camel Was Killed?
The University of Michigan with the Department of Health and Human Services completed a five year study with some encouraging findings about teen smoking. They surveyed 44,000 students from 8th through 12th grade and found a 9% drop among children aged 13 to 15, and 7% drop in smoking by older teens. Smoking had soared by 50% to record rates for teenagers from 1991 to 1996. Now more teens look on smoking negatively, because the media have given a less-glamorous presentation of smoking by television and films. This is certainly no time to ease pressure on this evil legal drug. Governor Cayetano wants to double the “sin” tax on alcohol, and we would be well served with an increase in tobacco tax also. In addition, states need to earmark the multibillion-dollar settlements received from tobacco companies for anti-smoking campaigns.

Where Were The Virologists When DDT Was Killed?
As if the economy in Hawaii hasn’t already taken a hit, the dengue fever problem hit the islands, and east Maui is struggling. Although most of the cases are in lower Nahiku, the secluded heavily forested region on the northeast coast of Maui near Haiku town, the whole area has felt the hit. Hasegawa’s General Store is empty, the Hana Ranch Hotel, Hana Road Fruit Stand, and other small businesses need the tour buses and vans which now are fewer in number. The state health department, and a CDC team of epidemiologists and entomologists descended on Hana town and environs to capture mosquitoes, gather blood samples, and mount a plan to contain the outbreak. Their efforts have been somewhat frustrated by the anti-establishment subculture of “super hippieland” enclaves that abound in east Maui. Initially there was resistance, because many distrust established medical care. One woman who suffered through a bad case of dengue never reported her illness because she didn’t want her land treated with insecticide. She stated the fewer cases reported, the quicker the region will recover. Yes, and if they just ignore the rats, the plague will go away.

Nothing Scares Me More Than Frightened People.
Fear of flying has been around since Orville first demonstrated powered flight. Prior to September 11, frightened passengers dwelt on the possibility of mechanical failures, engine failure, pilot error, in-flight collisions, and such, so counseling clinics focused on safety of equipment, training of pilots, and the thousands of safe flights every day. But, with the onset of airborn terrorism the subject has shifted. Now, instead of addressing irrational fears, counselors have to deal with real rational ones. Aviaphobes develop sweats, or perhaps nausea, get out of check-in lines looking for help to calm their nerves. The Fear of Flying Clinic in Seattle has an increasing number of calls, and Wings, run by Northwest Airlines in Minneapolis is now offering a three hour course to address new fears. The newfound fears of adults have fostered a 20% increase in the number of children with fear of flying. Some therapists encourage relaxation techniques and teach facts of flying, but other counselors have reservations themselves about security, and tell their clients to skip flying altogether, at least for the present.

Sex Is Like Money: Only Too Much Is Enough.
Ah, these college campus romances! In response to tales that Coca Cola is an effective spermicide, researchers at Harvard University added sperm samples to test tubes containing different types of Coke. The rumors proved to be only partly true. The scientists suggest that levels of acidic pH and perhaps some secret components (only Coke knows), were determining factors. They found that Diet Coke proved most effective, next was Classic Coke, followed by Caffeine-Free. Coca Cola Company was less than cooperative.

We do not promote Coca-Cola for medical purposes. It is a soft drink.

Hey, you campus romantics, what about Dr. Pepper?

Vice Foments War, While Virtue Does The Fighting.
While our politicians and business people complain about the profound drop in tourism, we all should be thankful for the presence of the military in Hawaii. The federal government annually pumps $5.2 billion into our island economy with the combination of Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard and National Guard and reserve units. Our state government enjoyed $640 million in taxes alone, and the Navy has awarded $500 million in construction contracts since 1996. Furthermore, the September 11th effect has added military spending, so while we can bemoan the decrease in tourist traffic, remember to smile and welcome military personnel and their families in our community.

If Someone Says “Don’t Worry,” Then It’s Time To Worry.
You probably didn’t recognize just how cheap your medical liability insurance rates have been for the past decade. Many companies have depended on their investment income in the strong stock market, but now the equity birds have come home to roost in the market downturn. Companies that undercut premiums to obtain clients are now drastically raising rates. In some locales they have doubled the tabs of just two years ago. This volatility caused malpractice giant St. Paul’s Insurance Co. to simply give up and get out of the market. Although doctors still prevail in 80% of the cases that go to trial, juries are known to be often moved by sympathy for the patient, and the median award jumped by 76% between 1996 to 1999. Moreover, the number of million dollar judgements doubled from 27 to 54 in just one year from 1999 to 2000. In the minds of the tube addicted jurors, a million dollars isn’t that a big deal. Regis Philbin offers that every other night. The fundamental code remains: communicate with your patients, document your care, and make timely referrals.

The Wheels Are Spinning, But The Hamster’s Gone To Town.
The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is constantly trying to keep food companies from deceptive advertising. Currently, the trend for some “natural-food” producers is to tack on a prominent label, non-GMO. Three years ago the phrase never appeared in America, but now you can find it on everything from pasta and breakfast cereal, to jam and baby food. The GMO refers to “genetically modified organisms,” and now appears on hundreds of food products. However, it is doubtful that the producers can be certain of their claim, because of 20 tested products 16 contained evidence of genetic material used to modify plants. The FDA believes that marketers are trying to play on the public’s worries about an unfamiliar technology, especially about food products that the FDA has declared to be safe. Of course, the underlying scheme is an attempt to convince consumers that such products are better for health.

Nada Is Our Name, Nada Is Our Game.
Moving on in the para-medical, para-normal, let’s pretend world, a recent group study reported in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that auricular acupuncture therapy for cocaine addiction was no more useful than relaxation control. Acupuncture is widely used to treat cocaine addiction in Europe and the United States, but effectiveness of this treatment has been inconsistent. 620 cocaine addicts adulting reporting in six community-based clinics around the country were evaluated using a specific National Acupuncture Detoxification Association (NADA) protocol of needles inserted at four points in or near the concha. Treatments were offered five times a week for eight weeks, with 3 and 6 month random follow-up urine screening. When compared with the control group, no difference was found. What a surprise! For all the good they did, you could stick the needles … never mind.

“Speak Again, Sweet Lips, I’ll Find You.”
Chaucer

Michael Levitt, M.D., a gastroenterologist at the Veterans Administration in Minneapolis, Minnesota, conducted some detailed research on passage of flatus. Contrary to previous assumptions that indole and skatole generated during digestion cause the foul smell, the real culprit is hydrogen sulphide. He also dispelled the belief that men tend to produce more objectionable gas than women. Levitt found that the average female expulsion contains a much larger percentage of hydrogen sulphide than that of men. With about 10 emissions per day, the usual output will inflate a balloon. Levitt found that methane and hydrogen sulphide are combustible and have caused some serious operating room explosions. He helped formulate a new purgative that cleans the bowel and disperses almost all gas, and colonic detonations are now rare. So, let’s hear it for Dr. Levitt – no, no, not that way.

ADDEnDA

❖ 90% of Americans do not know that being overweight increases the risk of stroke.
❖ 4.8 billion gallons of water are flushed through American toilets every day.
❖ Hello, this is the incontinence hot line…..Can you hold, please?
Aloha and keep the faith — run.

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