The Weathervane  Russell T. Stodd MD

Childhood Begins With Mother Goose. Second Childhood With Father Time.

A Canadian study conducted by Mounir Bashour, M.D. FR.C.S.C., found a relationship between physical integument and the risk of corneal epithelial defects following refractive surgery. Specifically, patients older than age 40 had a six-fold greater risk of defects, and significant skin wrinkled patients were nine times as likely to have corneal epithelial tears after laser surgery. Lightly pigmented patients were 12 times as likely to have problems, and just having blue or green eyes yielded a 2.3 greater risk. So, according to Dr. Bashour, young black patients undergoing refractive surgery have little risk of corneal erosions, while older persons with pale, wrinkled skin should be cautioned about the increased possibility of post surgical defects.

The Television Ad Gives You The Headache It Is Supposed To Cure.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) wants to review its policy on prescription drug advertising on TV. In 1997 the agency made it easier for pharmaceutical people to use the television medium for direct-to-patient advertising of prescription drugs, and the ads have exploded across the screen with annual consumer ad spending now at $2.5 billion! The FDA intends to interview doctors for up to 15 minutes on the subject, and reward the physician with up to $100 for his time. Certainly, it is worthwhile to review this absurd policy which encourages patients to be their own doctors, but the question is, why pay for the input? Most doctors will be glad to tell the FDA anytime, anywhere, and with no more incentive than a phone call. No doctor wants his patient to use drugs beyond what the physician deems necessary and cost-effective. The FDA should curtail the stupid ads, and tell the drug companies to cut drug prices commensurately.

Super Contract Or Super Con?

In what is claimed to be a super innovation in contact lens technology, a soft lens made of fluoro-silicone hydrogel has hit the market for continuous wear “up to 30 days.” The claim is that the material allows up to 60% more oxygen transmission to the cornea than ordinary soft lenses, with no bacteria build up and less protein deposition. Supposedly, the lens could be offered as an alternative to laser eye surgery with a better risk profile, and less expense. Well, yes, the claims are fulfilled in clinical trials, but what about the real world of poor hygiene and careless habits? Eye surgeons are uniformly aware of ugly corneal ulcers generated by foolish patients using extended wear contacts, so healthy skepticism will no doubt rule physicians’ approach.

A Thing Of Beauty Is A Job Forever.

Ophthalmologists have long used botulinus toxin for the treatment of eye muscle imbalance, including facial and eyelid spasm. The drug is effective in producing temporary paralysis or muscle weakness of variable duration and degree. Now, in the ongoing battle for youthful appearance, cosmetology surgeons are using Botox, boasting of “reducing wrinkles” and “smoothing facial skin” by wiping out the action of various facial muscles. Never mind that the action is temporary and the flaccid muscles produce an expressionless Parkinson’s disease appearance, the narcissists are lining up. Allergan, Inc. is overjoyed at the prospect of turning a tiny limited market into a booming cosmetic one. It won’t do for all; many of us already have enough sagging muscles.

It’s Not The Pace Of Life. It’s The Sudden Stop At The End.

The Annals of Emergency Medicine recently reported on amusement park injuries. The newer parks offer rides reaching G forces exceeding those experienced by astronauts. The report suggests that there may be an increase in injuries involving head, neck and back trauma. Data is collected by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), and the risk of injury requiring medical attention is given as one in 124,000. However, these data are possibly too low, because large fixed-site amusement parks, e.g. Disney and Six Flags, are exempted by federal legislation from reporting injuries or undergoing accident investigations by the CPSC.

Discretion Is The Better Part Of ......... Indiscretion.

According to the Office of Population Research at Princeton University more than 50% of women between ages 15 and 44 have had an unwanted pregnancy. Additional survey data show that more than 80% do not know of the morning-after pill which can prevent almost 90% of those pregnancies. In an effort to attack the problem, the American Academy of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) has mounted an effort to influence their physicians. In a letter to their 40,000 members, ACOG is telling doctors to write prescriptions to give to their patients in advance for emergencies. An “accident” on Friday night might not allow a woman to contact her doctor, then get and fill a prescription within the time limits. The drug acts by preventing implantation, and is not an abortive like the controversial drug RU-486, so the window of effectiveness is brief. ACOG also is offering a sample letter to give to pharmacists to encourage them to stock the drug.

Of All Creatures Hunted For Sport, Woman Is First.

A study from Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital was conducted on a group of heterosexual men. The men were presented with pictures of men and women and responses recorded. The study was published in the journal Neuron which showed that pictures of beautiful women activated the same reward circuits in the men’s brains as food, pleasant tastes, and cocaine (?). Contrary, they found that the same males reacted negatively to pictures of attractive men, suggesting that they were threatened by good-looking guys. One of the study’s authors noted that this revelation was not shocking, but that the response is not conditional, and compared it to the same function found in lizards. Gez. Did some foundation actually fund a study to find out that men can be horny?

Now If You Don’t Mind, I Have Just One More Question I’d Like To Ask...

In Florida, a pain management physician was convicted of manslaughter because of a death caused by OxyContin. The jury believed the prosecution’s version of the doctor’s practice, charging that the doctor wrote prescriptions to anyone willing to pay for an office visit without proper questioning. It was claimed that his practice led to several deaths. The physician argued that he followed medical protocols and his prescriptions of OxyContin and other pain medications were legitimate. The doctor faces up to 30 years in prison, and plans to appeal. He is only one of several doctors accused of criminal charges in the management of chronic pain. “It’s truly scary,” according to Ira Byock MD, director of palliative care in Missoula, Montana. At least two more cases like this one are on the docket, one in California and another in Florida. No question, a manslaughter conviction and other criminal charges against physicians for pain management, will have a chilling effect on all doctors involved in caring for patients with chronic pain. And on the flip side of the coin is the recent California case where the doctor was found negligent for not prescribing enough pain medication. So, in pain management you could be damned for whatever you do.

If It Looks Like Chicken, Sound Like A Chicken, Smells Like A Chicken, Is It A ........... Peacock?

The Eyestorm art gallery in London, England, had an “art” display consisting of a pile of full ashtrays, beer bottles, soda cans, coffee cups and candy wrappers, all used, with a price tag attached of $7,000. The gallery janitor showed up and mistook the pile for party trash, which it appeared to be. “As soon as I clapped eyes on it, I sighed because there was so much mess. I didn’t think for a second that it was art of work of art,” he cleared up “the mess” and bagged and dumped it. The gallery bosses went wild when they realized their work of art had been dumped, so they went to the garbage bin, reclaimed the “art,” used photographs to reconstruct everything in its place, and attached a “don’t touch” sign to the display. Wow, this means that almost any Saturday morning the kitchen at my house should be on display at the Honolulu Museum of Art.

ADDENDA

❖ Kathleen Dixon, director of women’s studies at Bowling Green State Univ., on the refusal of the faculty to approve a course on the phenomenon of political correctness, “We forbid any course that says we restrict free speech.” Nothing like academic freedom in the new millennium.

❖ A replica of the slave ship Amistad at New Haven, Conn., was criticized because it wasn’t handicapped accessible.

Aloha and keep the faith —rts

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.