The Weathervane

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Expiring Minds Want To Know.

The full-body-scan promoters are in high gear. Playing on the premise that people “want to know,” it is the biggest craze in preventive medicine since Linus Pauling said vitamin C was a wonder drug. Assertions are made that seemingly healthy people can find out if they have heart disease, lung cancer, kidney stones, osteoporosis and a laundry list of other conditions, still in an early treatable stage. Costs range from $800 to $1,500, and insurance does not pay. This is one more idea in the struggle to make up for reimbursement cuts. Never mind that the radiation dose is many hundreds times a chest x-ray, and who cares if it can’t diagnose diabetes, thyroid disease, high blood pressure or other systemic illness. There are now over 100 clinics offering full body scans, and some predict that the number could soar to 4,000 within five years. So, if the test finds no abnormality, one can assume perfect health, right? Well, maybe you should read the disclaimer.

All The News That’s Print To Fit.

Sheila Dorn, D.O. was the corporate physician for the New York Times. The employer wanted the doctor to reveal medical records even though the patient did not give the doctor permission to share confidential information. When she stated that ethically she could not reveal confidential information, and that her job required her to evaluate objectively the patients’ health or disability, she was fired. She has brought a law suit for redress. Moreover, Dr Dorn’s suit claims that the NYT vice president for human resources told her to “misinform employees regarding whether injuries or illnesses they were suffering were work-related so as to curtail the number of workers’ compensation claims filed against The Times.” The newspaper argues that Dr. Dorn should not be allowed to bring a legal complaint, because there is no right to do so under New York’s at-will employment doctrine. However, this is a matter of professional integrity and ethics, and if the case is not allowed to go forward, the implication would be that corporate physicians would have to comply with employers and commit professional misconduct, or lose the job. The New York Supreme Court has not yet set a ruling date.

Time Flies Like An Arrow. Fruit Flies Like A Banana.

Our population is growing older and better informed, and visual loss with ARMD is certain to be the major challenge for ophthalmology in this century. Some medical research relies on double “blind” studies, but that phrase sounds dreadful for eye research, so we are treated to the euphemism, “masked.” Whatever! The AREDS (Age Related Eye Disease Study) crowd established with a masked, random, placebo-ized trial that a high-dose program of vitamin and mineral supplements reduces the progression of some cases of age-related (once called “senile”) macular degeneration (ARMD). Bausch & Lomb’s Ocuvite supplies the necessary vitamins C and E, plus beta-carotene and cupric oxide, but doubtless, other similar products are certain to be available. So far, the study showed a benefit only in patients with moderate and advanced ARMD. Still, it is something to offer patients who are logically fearful.

There Is No Place In A Fanatic’s Head Where Reason Can Enter.

Some anti-abortion sickies will go to great lengths to force their religious beliefs on others. A new tactical shift is targeting women who seek abortions, not just the doctors nor the facilities. The latest weapon is a camera. By conducting secret photo-ops from a van, the zealots snap pictures of patients seen entering abortion clinics. The photos are forwarded by e-mail to a web site devoted to posting “homicidal mothers” and within days the women can be seen on a website deceptively called “Christiangallery.com.” Last year an Illinois woman whose photo and medical records were posted on line, sued the activists and the man who ran the website. Her suit claims invasion of privacy and that she was subjected to humiliation and placed in potential harm. While the Constitution or Bill of Rights do not mention a “right to privacy,” courts have repeatedly ruled that Americans have a right to keep many details of their lives secret.

Sometimes One Pays Most For The Things One Gets For Nothing.

In Florida, a new “nice” insurance plan has been spawned in an attempt to control medical liability suits. By paying premiums between $500 and $1000/year and thereby pooling resources, the policy provides for legal counsel to attack frivolous law suits. Physicians would be able to use a panel of lawyers to review the case to see if it was filed frivolously, or filed on the basis of a bad medical expert witness. If the panel decides that is what occurred, the insurance company will pursue a countersuit for damages and the cost of the lawsuit. The goal is not primarily to recover damages, but to prevent physicians from being sued in the first place. There is no intent to deter legitimate complaints, but to discourage hungry attorneys from dabbling in non-meritorious suits.

This Article Is So Fresh, It Could Have Arrived On The Juneflower.

A study published in the March issue of Archives of Ophthalmology established that one daily drop of atropine is as effective as patching the eye for some children with amblyopia. Michael Repka, M.D. professor of ophthalmology at Whiner Eye Institute of Johns Hopkins University, the chairman of the study, pointed out that the daily burden to provide the treatment falls on the patient (family). As the saying goes, what goes around comes around, I would guess about 30 years ago. But, to add another familiar addendum, in academia the dictum is publish or perish.

After Two Days In The Hospital, He Took A Turn For The Nurse.

(She wasn’t there). The New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) has also noticed that there is a shortage of trained nurses. The latest publication notes a study documenting that serious complications such as urinary tract infection, internal bleeding, pneumonia and even death, can result when too few registered nurses are at the bedside. The study from the Harvard School of Public Health found that hospital stays are 3% to 5% shorter when levels of registered nurses are high. Moreover, those hospitals with nurses with the highest level of training had fewer “failure to rescue” deaths, that is those where death might have been prevented such as shock, bleeding, cardiac arrest or pneumonia, if the danger signs had been recognized earlier. The Institute of Medicine report six years ago stated there were not sufficient data to prove that more nurses improve medical outcomes, but this study (six million patient records from 799 hospitals) clearly demonstrates that proof.

And Now, Let’s Hear It For Alternative Health Care!!

In Anaheim, chiropractor James Aquila promoted his practice as New Age Healing with electro-acupuncture, hypnosis, and botanical elixirs. He claimed that his spinal adjustments blended with counseling and “psycho-biochemical” therapy would relieve addictions and other stresses of life. Actually, at his Midnight Therapy, good old “Dr. Jim” was running a house of prostitution. What was called “therapy,” according to prosecutors, was actually young women in miniskirts performing sex acts for cash. In the past year, Anaheim police have raided five chiropractic clinics which they claim are fronts for prostitution. In Los Angeles, police raided 18 chiropractic establishments since last October allleged to be bordellos. Moreover, in the past two years, the state board has stripped 11 practitioners of their licenses for involvement in prostitution, and is investigating similar allegations against 20 other chiropractors. Times are tough for chiropractors in California with HMOs cutting reimbursements, and reducing the number allowed in health plans. Many are struggling to pay the rent and pay off loans for education and equipment. Yet the number of number of practitioners has increased by 30% in the last 10 years. Meanwhile, here in Hawaii the spinal (and legislative) manipulators lobby hard to expand their scope of “practice.” They want status and participation in insurance plans, and even hospital staff privileges. Yo Momma!

Don’t Squat With Your Spurs On.

Sometimes human behavior stretches credulity. In England, a man wanted to enlarge his penis by injecting oil under the skin with a high pressure pneumatic grease gun. He was rushed to the Institute for Nephrology and Urology for repair of grossly damaged and ulcerated tissue. An additional strange part of this story is that it precipitated reports of similar attempts at penile enlargement in the U.K., the United States and Asia by men self-injecting with vaseline and other oils in some depraved idea of increasing manhood. Geez.

Aloha and keep the faith — rts

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