Artificial Intelligence Is No Match For Natural Stupidity.
The renegade sale of costume contact lenses has joined the bizarre fashion of body piercing of tongue, lips, nose, eyelids, ears, navels, and various body parts too weird to discuss, plus tattooing in a similar bizarre manner. The comfortable wear and the ease of manufacture has brought the use of these decorative lenses into wide use, especially among teenagers. The illegal sale of these plano novelty lenses with stars, circles, stripes, and even written messages has resulted in serious eye problems, including corneal ulcers and even blindness. The Food and Drug Administration has come out strongly stating that these costume lenses cannot be distributed without a valid prescription from a qualified eye care professional. Vistakon, CIBA, and Cooper Vision all market similar plano designer lenses through professionals and are very happy with the FDA ruling.

Sex, Religion And Politics - All The Ingredients For Controversy
Human papilloma virus (HPV) is an extremely common family of viruses that cause warts on hands, feet and genitalia, in both sexes. Cervical cancer is frequently caused by the sexually transmitted strains of HPV, and cervical cancer kills almost as many women worldwide as breast cancer. Studies done at Rutgers University revealed that 26% of freshmen women were infected before starting college, and 60% were positive after the third year. Now Merck & Co. has developed and plans to market a vaccine to prevent the infection, but selling the compound will be a major challenge. To be 90% effective, both boys and girls should receive the vaccine before becoming sexually active, say at age 10 or 12. The difficulties are obvious. First, can Merck convince pediatrics, family docs and OB-GYNs, to recommend the vaccine? Secondly can politicians be convinced to have the government include it in the vaccine package? And will parents want a vaccine for their children which seems to encourage promiscuous behavior?

Tobacco! Man’s Best Friend.
The 1998 legal settlement whereby major tobacco producers agreed to pay 46 states $206 billion over 25 years, included creation of the American Legacy Foundation, a group established to educate the public about the risks of tobacco use. One of the foundation’s television spots showed body bags piling up beside the headquarters of Philip Morris Co., the country’s largest cigarette maker. Lorillard Tobacco Co., parent of Philip Morris, has filed a lawsuit in North Carolina, alleging violation of the settlement agreement which bars “any person or entity, or any subdivision or affiliate of any person, company, or government agency.” The foundation stated that no vilification was intended, but rather a graphic expression that would attract age attention. Who will win the law suit? Who always wins, the lawyers, of course.

Is Life Worth Living? It Depends Upon The Liver (Not The Kidneys).
According to the Department of Health and Human Services, life expectancy in the United States increased by 30 years during the last 20th century. One might give credit to the great advances in surgical procedures or pharmaceutical tools, but in fact they accounted for only 5% of those advances. The other 20 years, or 80% came directly via the area of public health with advances in preventative medicine and hygiene. Pap smears, immunizations, prostate, colorectal exams, and skin checks proved to be very beneficial. These simple measures served to outreach social status, genetics, lack of healthcare access and environmental causes in extending life spans. Moreover, HHS tells us that 40% of premature deaths resulted directly from unhealthy behavior choices, particularly tobacco, obesity and diabetes. Painfully, the United States spends $240 billion each year in caring for the ravages of these three conditions alone. Of course, the most knowledgeable group in our society, the doctors of medicine, will practice preventative care for themselves, right? Guess again. According to the Archives of Internal Medicine, 46% of pathologists, 39% of internists, 34% of surgeons, and a mere 22% of pediatricians actually follow their own advice.

There Are Trains Every Hour All Headed For Oblivion.
The case of John Ashcroft vs. the State of Oregon is now before the U.S. Court of Appeals. The Attorney General wants to overturn the Oregon law allowing physician assisted suicide. Medical associations including California, New York, Washington, the San Francisco Medical Society, and the Society of General Internal Medicine have written briefs in support of the Oregon law, and are opposed to the Ashcroft suit. Yet they are also opposed to physician assisted suicide. While that appears contradictory, in fact it is not. Like many of us, those organizations all fear the heavy hand of the government, and feel that negating the Oregon law could have a chilling effect on physicians’ practices in regard to caring for the terminally ill.

Heaven Goes By Favor. If It Went By Merit, I Would Be Out And My Dog In.
Last Hawaii legislative session dwelt on the issue of so-called “death with dignity,” also called physician assisted suicide (PAS). It was narrowly defeated, but is certain to return this year. Oregon, the only state with a law allowing physician assisted suicide, has provided information in a July 2002 issue of Journal of the American Medical Association suggesting that while many people ask about PAS, very few actually use that method to end their lives. It was estimated that of 1,000 patients with terminal illness, only 100 discuss PAS with their families, and only 10 of those discuss the matter with their doctors. Then after evaluating alternatives with the doctor, very few choose suicide, so the alleged “landslide majority” favoring PAS is more philosophical than real.

Tastes Great! — Less Filling!
Let’s hear it for the couch potatoes. 70% of Americans do not get enough physical activity to provide health benefits. 40% have zero physical activity during their leisure time. 25% of all the children in America, spend four hours or more in front of the boodtube each day, and among high school students, more than one-third do not have any regular vigorous physical activity. The number of overweight adolescents has tripled since 1980, but that is no surprise since the number of obese adults doubled in the same two decades. But, maybe I am preaching to the choir with this report since Hawaii has been deemed the “health state” with the best health data in the country.

What Is More Beautiful Than Waking To A Warm Teddy?
Marketing devices are becoming the rage for some medical practices. In Missouri, an orthopedic day surgery facility bought a large shipment of teddy bears intended to raise patients’ spirits after surgery. Each bear wears a tee shirt with name, address and phone number of the facility along with wishes for speedy recovery. Hey, that’s cool! Wake up in pain in a strange bed, but have a warm, smiling fuzzy bear to greet you. Supposedly, patient generated referrals have increased ten fold.

If You Drink, Don’t Park – Accidents Cause People.
For 12 years a study was conducted at the Harvard School of Public Health evaluating the alcohol consumption of 38,000 adult males aged 40 to 75 years, in relation to fatal and non-fatal heart attacks. The observational study revealed that the men who drank three to seven times a week had a 32% to 37% lower risk for heart attack than non-drinkers. Findings showed that alcohol raises level of high-density lipoprotein (HDL), and also appears to affect platelet function, working to prevent blood clots. The report emphasized that binge drinking of five or more drinks provides no benefit and introduces a range of potential health hazards, e.g. liver disease, cardiac arrhythmias, cancer, auto crashes.

ADDENDA
✓ Talk about older than dirt! Strom Thurmond is older than New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arizona, Alaska and Hawaii. He is older than human flight, the Panama Canal, the World Series, wristwatches, tea bags, AM/FM radio, ice cream cones, and Dick Clark.
✓ On August 4, 1981, Steve Urner of Tehachapi, California, threw a dried 100% organic cow chip 266 feet.
✓ If a parsley farmer is successfully sued, can they garnish his wages?
✓ When you cross a snowman with a vampire, you get frostbite.

Aloha and keep the faith — retro●

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.