Creativity Is The Act Of Adding Two Plus Two To Make Five.
It's a long way to the eye clinic, but truly exciting research by Martin 
Friedlander, MD, PhD and associates at Scripps in La Jolla, California, was 
published in the Journal of Clinical Investigation. Using mouse models with 
a disorder that resembles retinitis pigmentosa, researchers showed that stem 
cells injected into the eye prevented blood vessels from degenerating and 
protected retinal neuronal tissue. The stem cells do not form rods or cones, 
but are incorporated in and around retinal blood vessels, and have a sight 
Preserving effect. Whether or not human eyes will respond similarly is not 
known. This research offers the possibility that with early identification 
and use of stem cells, macular and other degenerative retinal conditions 
may be brought under control.

Government Is Like A Baby - Big Appetite On One End, No 
Responsibility At The Other.
In California, a law was passed called "play or pay" whereby employers 
with 20 or more employees must provide health insurance for their work-
ners, or pay into a state fund that would manage workers' healthcare. The 
California Chamber of Commerce led a business coalition in gathering 
enough signatures to place a referendum on the November ballot to repeal 
the mandate. A trial judge threw out the petition, but the appellate court 
reversed his decision and the issue is back. Of course, in Hawaii, with no 
allowance for referendum, our socialist legislature forced a similar law on 
employers 30 years ago. However, California is a bellwether state, and 
what happens there is certain to be looked at by other legislatures. One 
of the powerful supporters of the bill is Jack Lewin, M.D., CEO of the 
California Medical Association. After his medical life in Hawaii, first as a 
family practitioner and later as state health director, he can speak from an 
experienced perspective.

We Need Corporal Punishment In Our Courts. We'll Use It On 
The Juries.
In Utah, the Supreme Court struck a landmark blow upholding the constitu-
tionalty of a cap on non-economic damages. The jury awarded $1,250,000 
in non-economic damages, but the Supreme Court reduced that figure 
to the $250,000 cap in accordance with the statute imposed by the Utah 
legislature. No one pretends that a cap will control all the problems with 
medical liability, but it is an important piece in stabilizing the skyrocket-
ing malpractice premiums. The American Medical Association has made 
tort reform the prime area of advocacy. Will tort reform with a $250,000 cap come to Hawaii? The Hawaii Medical Association, the 
Hawaii Health Systems Corporation, the Hawaii Hospital Association, 
and many business interests are working together to achieve that end. The 
issue is critical because patient access is becoming problematic, as some 
physicians have withdrawn services, some have retired pre-maturely, and 
some have left the state.

Fresh Kill For Hungry Legal Vultures.
Merck removed its big time pain medicine Vioxx from the market by 
"putting patient safety first." They claimed that studies linking the drug to 
heart attacks and stroke were "unexpected." What baloney! Internal memos 
and e-mails in the late 1990s recorded that Merck's own research showed 
that the drug had a greater cardiac risk than cheaper pain medications that 
reduced the risk of heart attack. Merck's research chief, Edward Skolnick, 
acknowledged to colleagues that the cardiovascular events were real, and 
called it a "shame." But, then the marketing people took over. They produced 
spin material and company documents that instructed representatives to 
dodge when responding to tough questions about Vioxx. In August of this 
year, a Food and Drug Administration drug safety office report showed 
that Vioxx correlated with a tripled risk of heart attack and sudden death 
when compared to people not taking the drug. Merck's wall of denial 
collapsed and the drug was withdrawn. "Unexpected" and "patient safety." 
Yo' Momma! In the matter of absent ethics or conscience, the drug industry 
has surpassed the tobacco industry.

A Woman With A Future, Teams With A Man With A Past.
When the telephone call came, Dr. Linda Buck, a professor at the Fred 
Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, was so shocked she thought 
it was a gag that she and Dr. Richard Axel of Columbia University were 
awarded the Nobel prize in physiology or medicine. No joke! Their out-
standing work in understanding how animals smell revealed that human 
beings are able to sense and recall more than 10,000 different smells. Their 
research demonstrated a large family of molecular receptors in the nose 
which bind to chemicals in the air to produce the sensation of smell. Over 
thousands of years, smell has become less important to humans, yet our 
olfactory sense allows differentiation of thousands of different substances 
from chlorine to clam dip. For Dr. Axel the $1.37 million award is a cap 
on an inventive scientific career which has proved lucrative for Columbia 
University. He observed that this work could lead to insight into how smells 
"lead to thoughts and behavior."

General Mills Should Be Court Martialed.
Paul Hamm is the American gymnastics star who made a brilliant high bar 
comeback performance to be awarded a gold medal at the Athens Olympics. 
Later, judges found that they had erred, that the athlete with the best overall 
score was a south Korean, and Mr. Hamm should have received a silver 
medal. The Korean team did not file a protest in the required team period, 
and Paul Hamm kept the gold. Subsequently, after much fuss and feathers, 
Olympic officials decided that Paul Hamm should not be penalized because 
the judges failed to score properly, and that his gold medal is official and 
legal. But not according to General Mills! The makers of Wheaties break-
fast of champions, will not place Paul Hamm's face on their cereal box, as 
they did with other Olympic champions, Carly Patterson, Justin Gatlin, and 
Michael Phelps (recently arrested for DUI and underage drinking - now 
there's a poster boy!). Of course, General Mills can decorate their cereal 
with whomever they choose, but makes you wonder if these mini-minded people 
are from France where judges are notorious.

Saint Francis Is Having An Out Of Money Experience.
The suits with the brief cases and the Sisters of the Third Franciscan Order are 
shuffling papers and information attempting to see if St. Francis Healthcare 
System can merge with Hawaii Pacific Health (Kapiolani Health, Straub 
Clinic & Hospital and Wilcox Health on Kauai). St. Francis is struggling 
financially, and is looking to follow the wave of mainland health care fa-
cilities which are collaborating and consolidating. David Sakamoto, MD, 
director of State Health Planning and Development Agency (SHPDA), who 
must ultimately rule on the merger, gives the plan only even money.

The Air Currents Of Knowledge Never Ventilated His Mind.
Two girls in Gilbert, Arizona were decorating the hall for a school dance. 
While filling balloons with the inert gas helium, they decided to inhale 
a mouthful to make themselves "talk funny." The school principal suspended 
the girls for five days for violating the school district's policy which pro-
hibits "the non—medical use of drugs." The father of one of the girls was 
angry. challenged the principal, and accused him of going overboard with 
the zero tolerance policy. The principal relented and reduced the suspension 
to one day. We need zero tolerance of morons who can't tell an inert 
substance from a drug.

ADENDA
[] A Turkish gas station attendant lost his cell phone. When he dialed 
the phone number, he was surprised to hear the ring coming from his 
dog's stomach.
[] Congress should be outsourced to India. We could save a lot of 
money, and get a lot more done.
[] Larry Hagman (Dallas, I Dream of Genie) says he wants his body 
ground up in a wood chopper and scattered in a field where wheat is to 
be harvested for a cake to be eaten by his friends and family one year 
later. What a guy! That's Larry all over.

Aloha and keep the faith —rtsS

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.