



## In The Old Days It Was Self Abuse. Now It's Game Boy.

A study of 10,000 workers at four Japanese companies, average age 43 years, claimed a link was found in the development of glaucoma in heavy computer users. The researchers reporting in the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health found the risk to be particularly strong in myopic males. The report noted that a third of the workers were found to be glaucoma suspects. While glaucoma is typically found in the elderly population, these workers were young, healthy males spending a lot of time staring at a video display screen.

## Sometimes Even A Blind Pig Finds A Truffle.

It seems an unlikely source for a creative idea, but the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has instituted a pilot program called "early offers" for malpractice complaints in federally funded community health centers and also in the Indian Health Service. When a person has suffered an injury and files a malpractice complaint, HHS will investigate. If it is found that the patient deserves a monetary settlement, the patient will be sent a letter explaining the program, and given 90 days to submit an offer to a third party administrator. HHS also has 90 days to provide a settlement offer. If the dollar amounts match or if the patient expects less than offered, the case is settled. If there is no agreement, the patient can proceed with a law suit as if nothing had transpired. Wow! Here is a plan with no lawyers, no court costs, no depositions, no prolonged delays, and just a simple, rapid disposition of a potentially thorny problem. Summarily, the entire award goes directly to the patient. The trial lawyers club is sure to mount a campaign to kill this plan.

## The Purest Form Of Charity Is Not Tax Deductible.

You can donate cash, a car or some other valuable to your church or favorite charity and get a deduction on your income tax. But suppose instead you give a precious body part such as a kidney to a sibling, or other family member, or a friend, or even a stranger who needs an organ for survival. To date, there is no federal tax deduction for organ donations. Two states, Wisconsin and Georgia, allow deductions for lost wages, travel and lodging expense up to \$10,000 for those who generously serve up a body part for transplant. According to the United Network for Organ Sharing, 17 people die each day for lack of a vital organ, and 87,000 are waiting and hoping for organ transplants. In 1993, 16% of transplants came from live donors, but that number had increased to 27% in 2003. Bio-ethics experts question the use of the tax code to encourage such donations, since that would give state imprimatur to the action (Would that be so bad?). No one suggests that donors should receive payment, but surely some mechanism can be devised to reward such altruism.

## Why Is Grandma Throwing Up?

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) put out some interesting statistics on reproduction in American women. Fewer women under age thirty are giving birth, while deliveries in ages 30 and beyond are increasing. Teen birth rates fell 3% in 2003, marking a trend that has continued for 12 consecutive years. On the opposite end of the reproductive spectrum, the delivery rate for women 40 to 45 increased 5%. Meanwhile, the caesarian section rate is growing by big numbers. Nine years ago, 18% of deliveries were by caesarian, but in the intervening years it has increased half again to 27.6% in 2003. The precise reason for the increase is not known, but speculation centers around older women giving birth, and physicians' concerns about the risk of vaginal delivery. Moreover, VBAC (vaginal delivery after c-section) complications have resulted in some huge malpractice awards, a factor which always lingers in the obstetrician's mind.

## Everything Has A Limit, Except The Attorney's Bounty.

Skeptics who doubt the value of a \$250,000 cap on non-economic damages in controlling malpractice premiums can look to Texas. The Texas Medical Liability Trust, a physician-owned company formed in 1979 which provides policies for more than half of Texas physicians, cut premiums by 12% after voters passed a constitutional amendment patterned after California's MICRA statute. Now they have projected a further reduction of 5% beginning in January 2005. If the Senate of the United States will pass a similar bill, that ugly malpractice cloud won't disappear, but it will be far less ominous, and it would move the issue off state legislative agendas. Then our local law makers can get on to other important things, such as finding a parking place in Honolulu.

## Try To Keep Your Road Kill Under Ten Pounds.

On an overall basis for motor vehicle deaths, the number of motorists killed by collision with animals is minuscule. Still, the statistics are interesting, because the number increased by 27% for 2003 over the previous year. What is strange is the propensity for motorcycle deaths. While the total number of fatalities was 201, 60 (30%) of those were motorcycle deaths, far out of proportion for the number of bikers on the road. The ratio is 41 car-truck registrations for each motorcycle. Two thirds of the biker fatalities were not wearing helmets, and of the auto deaths, 60% were not wearing seat belts. For autos and light trucks, the main risk was not in striking the animal (usually a deer), but in loss of control and rolling over, or striking an object off the road. In 14 cases, death occurred because a deer struck by a car, crashed through the windshield of a car going the opposite direction.

## The Drug Advertising People Are In Need Of Brain Dialysis.

Another thing that was better done in the those golden halcyon days gone by, was drug marketing. Fifteen years ago, pharmaceutical companies depended almost entirely upon a staff of representatives to call on doctors to market their products. In 1989 the pharmaceutical lobbyists pressured the Food and Drug Administration to loosen the requirement for a "brief summary" of indications, side effects, effectiveness, etc. Subsequently, direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising took off exponentially. In 1989, drug producers spent \$12 million on DTC, but by 2001 the figure had grown to \$2.38 billion. Now when an ad appears on television, it is difficult to know if the mini-drama is selling beer, perfume, a cruise or sex. Pfizer was warned to discontinue a Viagra add showing a balding man accompanied by an attractive woman, advising that the drug would bring back that "wild thing" which they both remember. The scene never tells explicitly what the drug is supposed to do, but there can hardly be any doubt. Of course, the last line is always, "ask your doctor...." It's easy to despise the drug marketers in this new millennium.

## They Are Empowered By The Department Of Homeland Stupidity.

While conducting a classroom search for a missing item at Holme Elementary School in Philadelphia, a ten year old girl was found to have a pair of scissors in her book bag. School officials acknowledged that she had not threatened anyone, but called the police, claiming a violation of state law for "weapons" on campus. The girl was removed from class, handcuffed(!), and taken to the police station where she was released without being charged with a crime. The child was frightened and cried profusely. She also noted that scissors are routinely used in classrooms. Still, the moron school officials suspended her for 5 days while awaiting a hearing.

## What A Deal! A Trip To Disneyland And Botox For Your Wrinkles.

Two ambulatory surgery centers in southern California are under federal indictment for fraud. These creative people are accused of targeting people with generous insurance plans and flying them to California. They provide hotels, travel expense, and a cut of the proceeds for heavily overpriced and unnecessary procedures such as sweat gland removal, pain management, adult circumcision and colonoscopy. Patients also frequently get a cosmetic procedure as a bonus. Additional participants in the scam are recruiters and physicians.

## ADDENDA

- ❖ Pirates believed that wearing an ear ring in a pierced ear improved their eyesight.
- ❖ 94% of physicians between the ages of 60 to 64 hire a tax pro to do their annual IRS return.
- ❖ The skin you peel after a bad sunburn is called blype.
- ❖ A hungry fly came into the bar and settled down next to an attractive woman. "Hey, lady, I like that stool you're sitting on."

## 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.*