ANYBODY GOTTA LIGHT?  The May 2005 British Medical Journal reported on the association of age-related macular degeneration (ARMD) to the use of tobacco in a cross-sectional analysis of 49 practices. Results of the BMJ study revealed that smokers are more than twice as likely to suffer ARMD as non-smokers. Discontinuing tobacco use for ten years reduces the risk by about half, and 20 years of cessation brought the risk to the same as non-smokers. It has long been known that tobacco contributes to vaso-constriction, attherosclerotic plaques, and vessel occlusion. What does it take to get smokers to quit this ghastly legal drug? They suffer premature aging, heart disease, impotence, cancer, and blindness, not to mention bad breath, loss of smell and risk of fire. The surgeon general's package warning should add, "You may go blind."

BACTERIOLOGY LAB. STAPH ONLY.  A previously healthy 52-year-old woman came to an emergency department (ED) complaining of two days of headache, abdominal pain, diarrhea, lethargy, and myalgia. She was afebrile with right axillary lymphadenopathy, blood pressure of 81/40 mm Hg, abdominal tenderness, and scleral icterus, but no rash. She had elevated WBC of 13,800, platelets of 71,000, and elevated bilirubin of 5.8 mg/dl. BUN and creatinine were elevated also. She was admitted to the intensive care unit, treated with ciprofloxacin, metronidazole and vancomycin, and given two units of blood, but died 12 hours after admission. Culture revealed sepsis with gram negative filamentous bacteria. Strep moniliformis, commonly found in oro-pharyngeal flora of rats, and a cause of rat bite fever (RBV). The patient had been employed in a pet store, and had been bitten by a rat four days before arriving in the ED. She cleaned the wound and applied antiseptic ointment immediately after the bite. Unless treated promptly, RBV has a fatality rate of 7 to 10%, so while the rat flea typhus (on Maui) is ugly, the rat bite can be uglier.

THE SUN GOES DOWN JUST WHEN YOU NEED IT THE MOST.  In Phoenix, Arizona, a group of pediatricians has opened a practice with hours from five P.M. to five A.M. They offer complete care with on-premises lab and x-ray for non-life threatening illnesses. They do not want to compete for the patients of other physicians, but rather are carving out a new niche. The plan is to provide care for those patients who would otherwise try to get help at the local hospital emergency department. It seems likely that in time they will build a busy practice with a clientele unable to see their pediatrician during daytime hours.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF STUPID PEOPLE IN LARGE GROUPS.  In those bygone golden years of medical practice, board certification meant being examined and certified in the speciality of choice, the document was hung on the wall, and the tests were over. Those days are gone forever, swallowed up by board power and greed. Now re-certification is the rule, once every six to ten years, depending on specialty. Now all 24 boards that make up the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) will require that diplomates demonstrate competency in six areas; patient care, medical knowledge, practice-based learning and improvement, interpersonal and communications skills, professionalism, and systems-based practice. Each board will set up its own program, and the process is set to be phased in. Admittedly, I am a somewhat aged and crusty barnacle on this medical ship, but looking at all this hoop-hah provokes a hostile reaction. This bureaucratic production will surely give rise to a cycle of papers and documents enough to fill a file drawer for each doctor, and will anything really be gained? This appears to be ABMS people creating an industry on a pretense of quality.

TO TRUST MEANS YOU WILL ALWAYS FIND ONE WHO FAILS THAT TRUST.  A Florida surgeon failed his American Board of Surgery exam, and was allowed to review his test results at the board's office in Philadelphia. He spent four hours going over the test result, making notes, and he later passed the test. Hey! Why not turn this event to profit? The doctor reviewed his notes, and sold 86 of the 290 questions on e-Bay under the title "General Surgery Board Exam Review Questions." Ah, but plagiarism is frowned upon. The board found out about the e-Bay offer, and sued the doctor, claiming copyright violation. The doctor admitted his crime, and the case was settled.

FIRST DRAW THE CURVE. THEN PLOT THE DATA.  In 2001, Tufts Center for Study of Drug Development studied 68 drugs to determine the cost of research and development (R&D). The study claimed it cost $802 million for each new drug. However, only about 15% of pharmaceuticals are really "new," that is, based on newly discovered active ingredients. The balance are drugs already on the market, and are "me too" preparations, or sometimes merely prepared in new dosages. Many new compounds are in fact minor chemical alterations on profitable products when patents are running out. When Public Citizen looked at the Tufts report, they calculated the cost a different way -- simply divide the number of new drugs on the market by the industry's total R&D expense, and the figure is $108 million. Spending far more on advertising than R&D, the drug industry regularly records profits of 20 and 25%, and is one of the most profitable industries in the world. Meanwhile, pocketing big campaign gifts, the Congress and administration let the American public pay more for drugs than anyone else in the world.

THE VILLAGE CALLED. THEY ARE MISSING THEIR IDIOT.  Stupidest law suit of the month award should go to the woman in San Diego, California, who is suing Kellog, Post and General Mills, claiming that their sugared cereals advertising is misleading. Her claim is that she thought the cereals were healthier for her children, but heard over the radio that they are not particularly nutritious. Her attorney is seeking class action status. By law, the cereal boxes must have printed the ingredients, their caloric value, percentage of fats, carbohydrates, additives, etc. on the box. Hopefully, the judge will dismiss this absurdity, perhaps with the recommendation that the woman should learn to read.

WHEN SHE GOT ON THE SCALE IT SAID, "TO BE CONTINUED."  In New York City a 407 lb woman was very upset when it was found that she was too large to fit into the magnetic resonance imaging machine. She was even more upset when her doctor made arrangements to send her to the New York zoo which has an MRI capable of screening elephants and hippos, Hey, at least her doctor didn't phone Whale Watch for help.

ADDENDA  
- On a United Air Lines flight from London to New York, a 67 year old woman was having a heart attack. The stewardess opened the PA system and asked if there was a doctor on board. Sixty seven cardiologists answered! They were all on their way to a cardiology meeting in New York. 
- O. J. - Not guilty! Richard Scruffy - Not guilty! Are juries really that stupid, or are prosecutors just that inept? 
- Odds that you will be struck by lightning - 576,000 to one; develop hemmorhoids, 25 to one; have a mental illness, five to one; be audited by the IRS, three to one; depart mother earth, one to one. 
- Winston Churchill was born in a ladies' room at a dance. 
- One cow asks another cow, "What do you think of this mad cow disease?" Her friend replies, "What do I care. I'm a helicopter."

ALOHA AND KEEP THE FAITH — RTS