



It's A Happy Talent When You Know How To Play.

In the 2002 winter Olympic games at Utah, the United States luge and bobsled teams performed, not merely better than ever, but beyond expectations. Part of the great improvement in results is attributed to the "visual training" directed by Barry Seiler, M.D., a practicing ophthalmologist at the *Visual Fitness Institute*, at Vernon Hills, Illinois. The devices used include high-tech computer displays and various string and bead tools. Exercises are designed to evaluate and improve visual skills such as peripheral vision, depth perception, contrast sensitivity, speed of focusing, tracking with eye-hand-body coordination and visual acuity. By providing the athletes with a high degree of visual confidence and reaction, correct moves can save hundredths of a second in extremely high speed events. Visual fitness and training seems sure to become a routine part of athletic training for high speed events.

He Has The Body Of A God ----- Buddha.

It is known that one in three Americans is overweight and one in five is obese. Rand Corporation of Santa Monica, California, completed a cost analysis of 10,000 adults ages 18 to 65 in evaluating medical expenditures. While there has been a proliferation of prevention programs in schools and workplaces about tobacco, substance abuse and alcohol consumption, body weight has not been seen as anything to worry about. The study found that obesity is associated with an average increase in medical costs of \$325 annually, smoking is linked to an increase of \$230, and drinking problems with an increase of \$150 beyond the average. (I believe that the last figure is misleading since many auto crashes, home accidents, and domestic violence are actually due to alcohol abuse.) The Rand report was summarized, "We can't nail down costs exactly, but the very strong effects of obesity are clear."

Advertising: The Cheapest Way Of Selling Goods, Especially Ones Of Questionable Value.

Pill pushing is very big business in the United States. Europe, with a greater population than the U.S., spends less for drugs. The European Union has a ban on prescription drug advertising which is believed to help keep health care costs under control. Now, what a surprise, the drug makers want the ban removed, and argue that it unfairly crimps patients' access to information, and thereby access to drugs. Two thirds of the \$6 billion in world wide sales in 2000 was racked up by U.S. contributions to the pharmaceutical industry. The European commission is considering allowing drug makers to market treatments for AIDS, diabetes and respiratory problems. If approved, the measure would allow patients to seek out information on web sites, but would not permit other direct ads. Consumer groups argue that relaxing the ban will bloat drug companies marketing budgets, push prices up, and do nothing to enhance health care. Amen.

The Judge: A Law Student Who Marks His Own Examination Papers.

The American Tort Reform Association (ATRA) reports that 27 states have no limits on non-economic damages for malpractice complaints. When laws have been passed in the legislatures, personal injury attorneys file suit and fund the cases that have led to limits being struck down. In Oregon, a state court struck down limits established by the legislature, and jury awards of \$8 million, \$10 million and \$17 million resulted shortly thereafter. Nevada has no limits either and insurance premiums have soared. The Los Angeles Times reported that some liability premiums in Las Vegas moved from \$37,000 to \$250,000. Many doctors are taking the only logical step - they are either quitting or leaving. Already doctor poor, Nevada ranks 47th in number of doctors per unit population. Everyone involved in medical liability knows that the California MICRA statute is the bellwether for controlling expenses, which is why trial lawyers in other states, fight so vigorously whenever it is proposed.

In Matters Of Style, Go With The Flow. In Matters Of Principle, Stand Like A Rock.

Hawaii's very own 800 pound gorilla, Hawaii Medical Services Association (HMSA), made the front page of the *American Medical News*, March 25, 2002. The concern is one of personal privacy for physicians who participate in HMSA's preferred provider organization (PPO). About 70%

of Hawaii doctors are now required to sign a contract to allow HMSA to conduct whatever search deemed appropriate into the doctor's personal medical records. The American Medical Association has policy opposing any contract to provide care that requires access to a physician's own medical records. That policy does not discourage HMSA.. Richard Chung, M.D. HMSA credentialing chairman, says that most physicians are granting the authority, but Gerald McKenna, M.D., HMA president, and a handful of Hawaii's doctors (including your editor) have raised opposition. Do doctors take time to read the contract? Do they understand what the gorilla is ordering? Didn't Mr. Lincoln sign a proclamation about slavery?

Any Woman Is Happy As Long As She Looks Younger Than Her Daughter.

The world of narcissism remains wide open for creative surgeons. In New York, a cosmetic surgeon is capitalizing on the trend of navel-baring and low-rise jeans by building a better belly button. The youthful navel is vertical, but after weight gain and child-bearing, women often sport a poochy, round, less appealing perspective. By doing a little lipo-suction, a mini-tummy tuck, tightening a few stomach muscles, and giving the skin a vertical stretch, voila! — the teen age belly button returns. Price tag - \$8000 to \$12,000, cash in advance, please.

Civilization Is The Progress Toward A Society Of Privacy.

Where does the matter of privacy prevail when weighed against suspected drug use? A 16 year old honor student, choir member, musician, and member of the academic team (and later accepted to Dartmouth) was randomly drug tested (her English teacher and academic team leader outside the door, listening). The test was negative. The student was angry and filed a lawsuit alleging invasion of privacy. The school district said the random testing is a response to "a longstanding problem of drug use" in the community. In all, 484 tests were conducted on students involved in extra-curricular activities over a two year period, and three were positive. Tecumseh, Oklahoma, is not a high drug use community. The U.S. district court supported the school's program, but was reversed by the U.S. appeals court, saying drug use among students subject to the testing policy was negligible. The case has percolated up to the Supreme Court of the United States.

It Is Not A Fragrant World.

And on more "reefer madness" in Ottawa, Canada, a school board suspended a 15 year old boy because a drug-sniffing dog barked at his jacket. No drugs were found, and the student claimed to have nothing to do with marijuana or any other drugs. The jacket could have hung next to a drug-contaminated coat in a closet, made contact on a bus, or even brushed against one in the street, or perhaps the dog was wrong. So, whom do you believe, the dog? The boy? A police spokesman who handles drug-searching dogs, said much more than a bark from a drug-sniffing dog is required for evidence, but the "zero tolerance" school board at the Catholic school has refused to back off. Book 'em, Danno!

Ah, The Power Of The Electorate.

Wishing to allow service people to have a vote by the Internet in the last national election, the Pentagon established a project for soldiers to cast their ballots using computer science. Cost of the project was \$6.2 million, and the number of votes cast --- eight-four (84). The cost per vote was \$74,000! Your tax dollars at work.

ADDENDA

- ❖ Eyelashes recycle in 90 days.
 - ❖ Each day, Americans eat 18 acres of pizza.
 - ❖ Doctors claim cheerful people resist disease better than grumpy ones. The surly bird catches the germ.
 - ❖ What do you get when you date a clown? Carnival knowledge.
- 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.