



Our forefathers threw out the British to relieve us of a fat, insensitive wasteful government—Nice try, guys.

That wonderful bureaucracy, Health Care Financing Administration, has done it again. To curb abuses in the home health industry, Stark II of the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 requires owners to post a \$50,000 bond for anyone who supplies durable medical equipment, prosthetics or orthotics. In aiming to eliminate the cheating companies that give fake addresses, provide false billing, and fail to provide services, HCFA has gone overboard. HCFA defines cataract eye glasses as durable medical equipment, so as it stands right now, any optical shop providing for Medicare patients after eye surgery will have to post a \$50,000 bond. You know they are off base when even doctor-hating Pete Stark has said that HCFA is wrong.

Don't be first. Don't be last. Never volunteer. (Motto USMC)

When no doctor answered the request over the cabin address system, the flight attendant found me. I was asked to evaluate an exhausted, overweight, sick, male tourist returning to Chicago. He admitted to gorging and boozing at a Kaanapali luau before departing for the airport, and the captain was considering an emergency landing in Denver. After examining the man, I did not recommend an emergency landing, and United Air Lines in a gesture of gratitude for saving them big \$\$\$, sent me.....a putter (and I don't play golf). The next time you are high in that huge kerosene queen of the skies, you might be called to render first aid to a passenger in distress. Previously, airlines provided a very modest medical kit, but now American Airlines expects to have defibrillators installed on all domestic and international flights. United and Delta are expected to follow suit this summer. Also, they plan to install expanded kits containing medications to treat heart attacks, diabetes, asthma, and allergic reactions. Defibrillators are not required by FAA regulations, but the Feds are reviewing their standards. Congress recently passed legislation that protects airlines and individuals from liability in passenger medical emergencies, and President Clinton signed the law.

Exceptions prove the rule, and wreck the budget.

Who should pay for *Viagra*? Federal health officials have been notifying states their Medicaid programs must pay for *Viagra*, but announced that policy may be discontinued if it becomes evident that the drug is being abused. Abused?? Who would decide, Martha Stewart, Hugh Hefner, Dr Ruth, Billy Graham, Dear Abby, or perhaps the *Viagra* poster boy in the Oval office? *Pfizer Inc.*'s new impotence drug has a retail price of \$10/pill, and some insurers, such as *Kaiser Permanente* in Oakland and *Aetna/U.S. Healthcare* won't cover the drug because of cost. Kaiser estimated an expense of \$100 million a year if it covered *Viagra*. Two other major health insurers *Prudential Ins. Co of America and Humana Inc.*, have decided not to pay either, but they are citing concerns over risks, claiming that they were not assured of the drug's long term safety. As of mid-June, the FDA had received about 30 reports of men dying after taking *Viagra*, but many of these were elderly and had known serious health problems. Since the drug became available in April, about 2 million men have used the drug. Medical industry analysts have said the real concern is cost not safety, but since managed care is the prime example of what is wrong with health care, they fear denial on the basis of cost.

Teamwork is essential. It allows you to blame someone else.

Item - The recent AMA House of Delegates meeting in Chicago brought forth an anguished cry from around the country over the planned evaluation and management (E&M) codes that HCFA is intending for Medicare documentation. The truth is that organized medicine helped create this monster, but supposedly did not recognize what would ultimately arrive. HCFA has delayed implementation for the present, but eventually the bean-counters will force this upon us. In fact, the ophthalmology codes were well organized and structured, and found to be acceptable. Sadly, the other specialty organizations failed to similarly prepare, and got the "garbage in - garbage out" result.

ITEM - Regarding the *Sunbeam* fiasco, the House turned up the heat on the Trustees, but could get few answers on monetary damages, not for lack of candor, but because so much is hanging in legal limbo. Suffice to say, there are many bills yet to pay, big time.

ITEM - E. Ratcliffe Anderson MD (he wants to be called Andy, not Ratty) the new executive vice-president (CEO) was introduced, and gave a rousing speech. He has the daunting task of restoring confidence and trust in the leadership.

ITEM - The next interim House of Delegates meeting will be in Honolulu in December at the Hilton, so plan to attend at least one session and observe this most democratic of all medical assemblies. Would that our AAO Council were similarly empowered!

The art of medicine is to amuse the patient until nature cures the disease.

How many of your patients are into alternative therapy for medical problems? A study in the journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics revealed that 51% of families (those without cancer) indulged in alternative therapies, while 65% of families with cancer used alternative treatments. Specifically, the healing practices used were therapeutic massage, acupuncture, imagery, energy healing, prayer and medicinal herbs. Putting it more simply, at least half of your patients are not content with your therapeutic prescription, but resort to addition or substitution to obtain the desired end. Personal experience here on Maui is that some of my "organic" patients first used mother's milk or herbal tea before seeking help for a red eye.

If you want a friend in this life, get a dog.

That warm and fuzzy, lovable Hawaii Blues organization (HMSA), has decided to send questionnaires to our patients asking them to evaluate the care received from their doctors. Some patients have been surprised and confused by the forms, and wonder if the doctor is being investigated for misbehavior or malpractice. The pretense is to "award" good physicians, but of course, the opposite effect is perhaps just as likely. That is, doctors could be reprimanded by HMSA for negative reports when patients perceive an unnecessary delay, or too short a visit, or the doctor was uncommunicative, or whatever. Let us balance this interrogative. Why not evaluate the health plan as was done by the MEDSTAT Group in New England. 81,000 patients and 40,000 physicians across the country were asked to rate their satisfaction with various health plans. In a similar action, in February the Department of Health and Human Services surveyed 130,000 Medicare beneficiaries asking them to rate their managed-care plan on a scale of 1 to 10, and later they will survey fee-for-service plans. Its is time! Let's find out if you like your health plan with a series of pointed questions about delays, coding systems, telephone responses, downgrading claims, appeal mechanisms, etc.

The C students run the world.

The Clinton administration caused a flurry of excitement when it filed suit against *United Parcel Service* for refusing to hire drivers who have "monocular" vision. The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) awarded damages to a former Omaha policeman who had lost sight in one eye, and suffered peripheral loss in the other. The police chief refused to rehire the man and the ADA awarded \$200,000. In another case the employer prevailed in court when it dismissed a forklift truck driver who was blind in one eye, and had three forklift accidents. As every eye surgeon knows, there is a great difference between the "blindness" of 20/200 visual acuity and absence of an eye. Moreover, occupational risks such as construction labor or police work, cannot be compared to a maritime officer or taxi driver, yet that is what the ADA and the EEOC rules imply. The issue demands a careful professional opinion and not an arbitrary statutory rule, and the law should be so structured.

Addenda

- ❖ Oscare Wilde's father was an ophthalmologist and in 1853 was the first appointed ophthalmologist to Queen Victoria.
- ❖ Moderation is a fatal thing. Nothing succeeds like excess. (*Oscar Wilde*)
- ❖ The average human eye takes 14 years to grow to its maximum size.
- ❖ Medical fact: pigs can catch swine flu from humans.
- ❖ Never kick a fresh turd on a hot day. (*Harry S. Truman*)

Aloha and keep the faith—rts ■