



# The Weathervane

## **Nothing ever works out but sometimes something else does.**

For years walk-in patients have had "eye exams" at department stores, e.g. Sears. Now two Illinois hospitals have opened a breast cancer screening center in a Skokie Nordstrom department store which takes both walk-ins and appointment patients. If there is a wait, the lady is given a beeper so that she can shop around until called. The X-rays are taken by mammography techs, interpreted by hospital radiologists, and the results forwarded to the patient's personal physician.

## **He is like the rooster who thinks the sun rises to hear him crow.**

Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts was effectively blocking the health reform bill before Congress, but he has now given in. His primary opposition was that he did not want to allow medical savings accounts. The reason is not that he feared they will fail, but rather that he is certain they will work, both to control costs and to allow choice. It is a fact that the success of MSAs will surely reduce the possibility of an eventual federal takeover of the entire health care system. Since that takeover has always been Teddy's goal, he placed his ever-enlarging bulk in the way. What a guy; he works so hard to protect the poor in America, to insure that they will always be there.

## **I don't suffer from insanity; I enjoy every minute of it.**

If you still labor under the delusion that we live in a sane world, not that in Los Angeles, surgeons at Cosmetic Surgery International perform 30 to 45 penile enlargements each week, and are booked a month ahead. Some surgeons, plagued by managed care and reduced incomes, see penile enlargement as a great money maker. Free from regulation, the operation to lengthen and/or widen the penis is offered with ads and brochures to appeal to men with a poor self image, or to use the old phrase, an inferiority complex. The American Urological Association and the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery claim that the "surgery has not been shown to be safe or efficacious," but it is now big business (careful, not too big). Some recent testimonials, "This is absolutely the best thing that ever happened to me," and "now when I go into business meetings, I'm thinking, 'if you guys had just half of what I have,'" and "I can't believe I waited so long." However, the malpractice attorneys are enraptured, as the complaints pile up; infection, scarring, impotence, and incontinence. I wonder what you would call an attorney who specializes in this area of litigation?

## **Habit is habit and not to be flung out the window by any (wo)man.**

Poor Hillary! Not only is she accused of wading around in Whitewater (but she forgot that), and trashing the White House travel office staff (shoe doesn't recall), but her recent pre-election boo, "It Takes a Village and Other Lessons Children Teach us," has come under criticism. It seems that her ghost writer, Barbara Feinman, received \$120,000 paid by the publisher, Simon and Schuster, and critics say that amounts to a gift to the first family. Moreover, Ms. Feinman received no credit or acknowledgment in the book, and had to sign a confidentiality agreement. It remains a fact: dress her up, fix her hair, anoint her the first lady, and have her converse with Eleanor Roosevelt, but a lawyer is always a lawyer.

## **It is always with the best intentions that the worst work is done.**

An unprecedented criminal action in Florida was brought with the arrest of a medical director of an HMO who was not licensed to practice medicine in that state. Although he is board certified in family practice and holds a medical license in Wisconsin and Indiana, the doctor is being prosecuted for practicing without a license in Florida. He apparently crossed the line beyond administration by making recommendations and decisions for care. The attorney for the Florida Medical Association stated that making recommendations for care is interfering in the doctor-patient relationship, and that is practicing medicine. If HMO medical directors are not licensed, there is no way to regulate them, and they are accountable to no one but the stockholders, according to a FMA spokesman. Ah, yes, managed care—good for investors, not so good for doctors or patients.

## **Gatekeepers provide excellent care, if you are not too sick.**

An interesting study involving 221,000 patients at Duke University Medical Center suggests that patients arriving in the emergency room with chest pains, and diagnosed as having myocardial infarctions, were at greater risk in gatekeeper medical plans. Of those patients who were immediately turned over to cardiologists, 31% died within a year, while 38% of those cared for by internists died, and general physicians lost 40.3% of similar patients within one year.

## **I live every day as if it were my last, which is why I sleep on a bedpan with a tube up my nose. (Bill Maher)**

While there appears to be strong public support for physician-assisted suicide, a recent study in the *Lancet* found that cancer patients wanted relief from pain, but did not seek suicide. Moreover, when queried about assisted suicide for reasons other than pain, support plummeted. Researchers found that depressed cancer patients were those most likely to request the service, irrespective of pain. The study appears to show a conflict, and rushing to make physician assisted suicide a constitutional right, may not serve those for whom the issue is supposedly directed. Additionally, those patients with terminal cancer were less trusting of those doctors who discussed suicide as an alternative.

## **What the government gives, it must first take away.**

In 1975, the Pennsylvania legislature passed a law providing for a professional liability catastrophe loss fund, and in 1995 the state run program had record payments of \$280 million. This fund is supported entirely by surcharges on a "pay as you go" basis; in other words, a bottomless treasure for malpractice attorneys. About 250 health care providers have refused to pay their portion of the \$107 million surcharge, saying this process is crushing them financially. Those physicians who chose not to comply are facing disciplinary action, and the licensing board is required by law to suspend or revoke their licenses. Lucky you live Hawaii!

Aloha and keep the faith—rts. ■