



Out With The Old. In With The Incompetent.

In a monumental backward step in health care, Oklahoma passed a law permitting optometrists to perform laser surgery. Veterans Administration policy allows health care professionals to function within the full scope of their state license anywhere in the VA system. So, when a Kansas VA facility was ready to allow an Oklahoma licensed optometrist to do laser work, organized medicine reacted, and got the VA to add the requirement that such optometrists must be supervised by an ophthalmologist. No laser surgeries were ever performed. A group of ophthalmologists and optometrists was empaneled by the VA to work out a mechanism for supervision. A stalemate resulted and the optometrists gave up the surgery issue. "We don't want any part of our work to be under others, so we would rather not do this in the VA." Small wonder. Supervision would reveal gross ignorance in optometrist knowledge and skills.

Against Stupidity The Gods Themselves Fight In Vain.

The *Miami Herald* carried a story verifying P.T. Barnum's law of childbirth. In Miami, a law professor with three doctoral degrees and teaching at the University of Miami, fell for the notorious Nigerian scam and sent \$1.68 million to a "government official" based solely on the e-mail contact. The official claimed to need some legal advice and offered the professor \$200,000 for his services in a legal matter with a truck leasing company. A check from Penske Truck Leasing to pay for equipment ordered from Freightliner in Atlanta, somehow got to the professor who volleyed it off to Nigeria. The U.S. Secret Service is investigating, Penske has filed a complaint with their bank, and the professor is still waiting for his "fee."

An Efficient Bureaucracy Is The Greatest Threat To Liberty.

Beginning May 23, 2005, physicians can apply to *Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)*, for the latest in identification. This ten digit number, the National Provider Identifier or NPI, is destined to be the number for each and every provider (once called doctor) in the country. Ultimately, the Medicaid billing number, and the drug enforcement agency (DEA) number may or may not disappear, CMS isn't sure yet. The plan is to have each and every one of us properly numeralized and entered in the giant data bank within two years after May 23, 2005. The various payers, HMOs, Blues, et alia, will have to work out their own details on how to deal with this latest in government mandated confusion. No doubt, we are headed for a body part tattoo or implanted identifier for both patient and doctor to coordinate, record and file whatever comes about. Hello, George Orwell.

Hello, This Is Medicare. How May I Misdirect Your Call?

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) set out to audit the 24 hour Medicare information line. In response to 300 test calls, the GAO found that 30% of the calls were not accurate and 10% of the calls did not get any response. 60% of the calls were answered accurately. In response, officials claimed that the number 1-800-Medicare, brought a heavy deluge of calls (16.5 million through September 30, 2004), and that representatives need more training. Worse yet was the separate audit of a special line for physicians' calls which found that only 4% got complete and accurate information while 60% were inaccurate, and 36% were incomplete. On the other end of the phone, if the physician screws up his/her billing numbers, the result may be a public accusation of fraud or theft, which the media loves to report.

The Trouble With Children Is They Are Not Returnable.

Child health experts have convinced just about everybody that "breast milk is best milk" for human infants. Yet some mothers cannot breast feed, so in an effort to comply with the pediatric dictum, they go to the dairy. There are milk banks where parents can buy donated milk that has been screened and pasteurized, but supplies are limited and used primarily for very sick infants, and they require a doctor's prescription. What to do? Simple! Go to the internet where human milk may be offered on e-bay for as little as 25cents an ounce, while milk from a certified bank may cost \$3 an ounce (plus shipping). Two bits an ounce sounds like a good deal, but unregulated milk has no control, no guarantee of age of the milk, nor of storage at proper temperature. Moreover, breast milk can carry diseases such as HIV, syphilis, hepatitis, and might contain illegal drugs, alcohol, heavy metals, and who knows what other contaminants. *The American Academy of Pediatrics* and *La Leche League International* are against unregulated breast milk, and it is illegal in some states to share body fluids or tissue except through a licensed facility. But hey, the internet doesn't pay much attention to such details as veracity and legality. Once again it's buyer

beware, or stick with formula.

A Flash Of Light, A Cloud Of Dust And — What Was The Question?

A rather frightening report came out of the recent annual meeting of the *American Society of Anesthesiology* in Las Vegas. A study at Duke University found that many elderly patients having non-cardiac surgery, usually joint repair or replacement, sustained significant declines in cognitive abilities after surgery. Patients sixty years and older were given a battery of cognitive tests pre and post op, three months later and again two years later. Of the 354 patients, 34% were found to have significant declines at three months, and 42% showed losses at two years. The control group of oldsters who had no surgery showed no measurable change in mental ability. Postulated cause is the anesthetic event or stress of the procedure or perhaps both, but in any case, more study is indicated, and I think that my BPH can be tolerated for the nonce.

All's Fair In Love And War, Or Is It?

In Kansas City, Missouri, an 18 year old man had consensual sex with a 14 year old classmate in a residential school for developmentally disabled children. Missouri state law considers sex between teens who are close in age a less serious crime than sex between a teen and older adult. However, the law only applies for heterosexuals, and in this event, the partner was another male. The judge gave the perpetrator 17 years in prison, but if the partner had been female, the sentence would have been 15 months. The appeals court said the sentence was justified because homosexual behavior is not part of "traditional sexual mores."

Children Should Be Seen And Not Had.

About 16 million American women take birth-control pills and hundreds of millions have used the medication since "The Pill" was introduced in 1960. Now in a huge federal study involving 162,000 women taking the hormones, results were presented at the *American Society of Reproductive Medicine* conference. While previous research suggested that The Pill increased chances of heart disease, the study found the opposite. The women showed lower risk of heart attacks, strokes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and other heart related problems. In summary, there's an 8% risk reduction of ever having cardiovascular disease. Moreover, women using the pill had a 7% lower risk of developing any form of cancer, especially ovarian and uterine cancer. The effect appeared to be most evident among those women who took contraceptives early on in reproductive years. And also, not mentioned is that there is a greatly reduced risk of that dreaded disease, pregnancy.

"Do You Want This To Come Or To Go?"

In Nassau County, New York, two women, ages 34 and 38, were running a hot dog wagon. However, rumors were that they were offering unusual side dishes besides the usual mustard and relish. When Rick Capece, commander of the county vice squad heard the gossip, he had an undercover officer investigate, and the two women were charged with prostitution. "It was a legitimate business, the most unusual thing I've ever seen," said Capece. The actual number of clients is unknown, nor what they usually ordered on their wieners.

ADDENDA

Americans consume 6 million pounds of squeeze cheese per year. (Ugh)

According to one survey, three out of four Americans believe in vigilante justice.

Blood comes in three colors: yellow, insects: blue, lobsters (and a handful of Bostonians): and red.

The praying mantis is the only animal on earth with just one ear.

Worldwide, an average of 300 million Coca Colas are consumed every day.

Money, to be worthy anything, must have blood and perspiration on it — preferably someone else's.

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.