



At HHS They Forgot To Pay The Brain Bill.

In August 2000 our beloved Department of Health and Human Services provided guidelines that all physicians who receive federal funding must provide at their own expense, a trained clinical interpreter for all their patients with limited English skills. The ruling covers all patients, even those with private insurance. Many physicians are enraged, pointing out that the reimbursement for a Medicaid office visit is about 1/3 of the interpreter's fee of \$150 to \$180. The American Medical Association is now on board about the absurd mandate regarding translators, stating, "The association is strongly opposed to allowing the burden of funding written and oral interpretation services for limited-English-proficiency patients to fall on physicians." Perhaps when enough physicians give up accepting federal dollars our great social planners will wake up.

Someday We'll Look Back On All This And Crash Into A Parked Car.

Pity those costumed performers who appear at athletic events dressed as mascots for the team. Edward McFarlane, M.D. reporting for the Johns Hopkins Sports Medicine Department, surveyed 48 mascots for pro baseball, basketball and football teams. 58% reported that they had experienced heat illness from donning their fur or feathers. Half of them required IV fluids. They endured injuries caused by falling on stairs, getting in fights, and even being run over by golf carts. 44% developed chronic lower back pain, 17% suffered knee injuries, 13% had ankle damage, and additional injuries were to hands, wrists and fingers. In all, the 48 mascots reported 179 injuries and 22 of those required surgery. Rah, rah, sis boom aaaaahhh!

Nobody Is Interested In Sweetness And Light.

Psychiatrists say it is unhealthy behavior and privacy advocates are very distressed, but rising paranoia is driving more and more Americans to spy on each other, on their neighbors, and even on their own families. Since September 11th sales of surveillance devices have increased by 30 to 60%. Fears of anthrax and other terrorist activities has caused people to install miniature cameras in mail boxes, anti-bug devices on their phones, miniature recorders for phone conversations, and some have even purchased night-vision goggles. A finger sized high quality microphone can be slipped in a shirt pocket, and a backpack clip can be attached to transmit junior's (or a spouse's) whereabouts. Many of these snooping tools are remarkably cheap, and many are not illegal. You could ask Frank Gifford. You can even purchase a high tech paisley necktie installed with a tiny video camera. Spy stores are quick to point out that they merely sell the goods, and it is up to the customer how they are used.

When Choosing Between Evils, Take The One You Haven't Tried Before.

The tobacco people are among the most creative in our society. The makers of snuff, that delicious (?) wad of yuk between cheek and gum, asked the Federal Trade Commission for permission to say in ads that its products could be a safer way to consume tobacco than cigarettes. USF Inc., maker of *Skoal* and *Copenhagen*, point out that while 400,000 long-term cigarette smokers die each year, only 9,000 die from oral cancer, and most of those deaths are linked to cigarette use. Merely 9000? That's only three times the World Trade Center horror. Gee, let's have a party with awards for foulest halitosis and longest expectoration.

If You Don't Know Where You're Going, When You Get There You'll Be Lost.

Al Gore and the greenhouse-gas-global-warming proponents, must be unhappy about the news from Japan. Now the Japanese government has dropped mandatory new restrictions on greenhouse gas emissions, indicating Japan won't be able to meet targets mandated under the Treaty. The restrictions proved too expensive for Japanese industry, one part of the reasons the U.S. Senate unanimously rejected the Treaty in 1997. The feel-good Kyoto Treaty lacks scientific evidence for greenhouse gases as the cause for "global warming," and moreover it is simply not worth the expense. Further, current studies of Antarctica reveal that the Ross Ice Shelf has grown several miles in the past two decades.

You Know You Can Trust Him. He Owes Money To Everybody.

In 1996, a study was published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* about zinc lozenges which concluded that "several possible mechanisms may make zinc an effective treatment." Subsequently, it became known that

before publication, one of the authors purchased stock in the company that made the lozenges. Later when the stock soared, the author sold some shares and made a profit of \$145,000. A survey by the *Journal of the American Medical Association* revealed that nearly 9 of 10 medical experts who wrote the guidelines for other doctors to use in research, had a financial tie with drug companies when they wrote them! More than 50% of the 100 experts received financial support for research, 38% served as employees or consultants for a pharmaceutical company, and an incredible 59% had financial relationships with companies whose drugs were considered in the guidelines they authored. No one is suggesting these scientists and clinicians are for sale, but the problem of unconscious bias must be recognized. Honest disclosure and appropriate clinical practice guidelines must be defined, and scientific journals must tighten policies about conflicts of interest.

Warning! Driver Only Carries \$20 In Ammunition.

A surgeon with 25 years experience, served as a consultant on a case where a patient died following a ruptured appendix. A law suit named the surgeon, among others, for negligence. The surgeon was later dropped from the complaint, but a colleague was found negligent, and the jury awarded a judgement of \$150,000. The surgeon was angry. He distributed a letter to his fellow physicians in the community naming the plaintiffs, the juror's names and addresses, as well as the names and addresses of four witnesses for the plaintiffs. His letter included statements suggesting these were people who "found a doctor guilty," and "others of whom I am leery." The letter backfired. Eight of the jurors brought a lawsuit against the surgeon alleging invasion of privacy, emotional distress, obstruction of justice, and intentional and malicious actions. The initial suit was dismissed, but the Court of Appeals reinstated the complaint which is pending before the state Supreme Court. Because the surgeon's action was an intentional act and not a matter of medical liability, the doctor is personally at risk for any penalties which may ensue. Without exception, all physicians are hurt, angry and want vindication when wrongly accused, but if the issue dies, let it die! Retribution simply doesn't work, and vengeance has been claimed by the Creator, so file it under "crapola" and get on with life.

Talent Is The Infinite Capacity For Imitating Genius.

Each year at Harvard University the *IgNobel* awards are presented for achievements "that cannot or should not be reproduced." For Biology, the award goes to Buck Weimer of Pueblo, Colorado, for inventing *Under-Ease*, airtight underwear with a replaceable charcoal filter that removes bad-smelling gases before they escape. For Public Health, an *IgNobel* award goes to Andrade and Srihari of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bangalore, India, for their discovery that nose picking is a common activity among adolescents. And most enlightening, the award for astrophysics goes to Dr. Jack and Rexella Van Impe of Jack Van Impe Ministries, for discovering that black holes fulfill all the technical requirements to be the location of hell.

A Newspaper Is A Circulating Library With High Blood Pressure.

Digital Industry, a journal that tracks publications, rated the country's newspapers as follows: "The Wall Street Journal is read by people who run the country. The New York Times is read by people who think they run the country. The Washington Post is read by people who think they ought to run the country. The Los Angeles Times is read by people who wouldn't mind running the country, if they could spare the time. The Boston Globe is read by people whose parents used to run the country. The San Francisco Chronicle is read by people who aren't sure there is a country or that anyone is running it. The Miami Herald is read by people who are running another country." The Honolulu Advertiser is read by people who want to return to a monarchy.

ADDENDA

❖ Doctors who use cell phones, fax machines and laptops work eight more hours a week than those who do not. (Guilty, Guilty, Guilty.)

❖ In London, England, Anthony Duda contacted Disney Inc. first, and then went to court to change his first name to Zipardi 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.