



Homer Is Dead, So Is Lincoln, And I'm Not Feeling So Good Myself.

On August 10th in Florida, Georges El-Bahri, M.D. the chair of the Florida Board of Medicine, called a "temporary halt" to office-based general anesthesia surgery (conscious sedation?). Dr. El-Bahri cited 20 adverse incidents reported to the state since April when new office-surgery rules went into effect, including five deaths resulting from office surgery (four involving cosmetic surgery). The state sent out certified letters to an estimated 600 physicians who could be impacted, and surgeons are scrambling to get operating space in hospitals or licensed outpatient surgical centers. Patients will face delays for surgery and will likely pay more for both cosmetic and non-cosmetic procedures. Some surgeons are in economic peril, and many have cut staff or even been forced to close the office. The actions followed a change in reporting rules related to a Fort Lauderdale *Sun Sentinel* newspaper story stating that at least 34 patients had died following cosmetic surgery in Florida since 1986, and later confirmed 11 more deaths, 9 involving office cosmetic surgery.

I Have Seen The Truth And it Makes No Sense.

Congresspersons did their usual posturing and oratory after the Institute of Medicine (IOM) gave out its controversial report on medical errors. Several Senators from both sides of the aisle - Arlen Specter (R), Tom Harkin (D), Charles Grassley (R), Joseph Lieberman (D) Bob Kerrey (D) and Richard Bryan (D) - rushed forward with bills proposing a mandatory reporting system. Before any irrational action could take place, Senate hearings revealed some of the holes in the IOM report, and the defects of a one-size-fits-all mandatory system on the entire health care field. A fairly reasonable bill, the Patient Safety and Errors Reduction Act, introduced by Senator Jeffords of Vermont is pending. Responsibility will fall on the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) to maintain a data base of voluntary reporting of medical errors which would only be used for research purposes. The information will remain confidential and cannot be subpoenaed or used as evidence in any legal proceeding.

The Difference Between A Vacuum Cleaner And An HMO Exec Is That You Have To Plug In The Vacuum Before It Sucks.

The stocks of many mainland HMOs tumbled last year. Earnings decreased and many have refused to contract for Medicare patients. According to *Corporate Research Group*, stock prices of 17 publicly traded HMOs fell 15% in 1999, yet their CEOs were paid an average of 14% more. Cigna chairman Wilson Taylor took home a cool \$7.5 million, and William McGuire, M.D. an internist CEO at United Health Group, struggled along with \$4.8 million. At the bottom of the list was United American Healthcare's Gregory Moses, Jr. who had to survive with \$325,000. No question, managed care really works well for a few, but not for patients or doctors, of course.

The Ultimate Question - With No Answer And No Solution.

A frightening medical accident occurred at Tulane University Hospital in March. Brain surgery was carried out on a patient who subsequently died. At autopsy in May the patient was found to have Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD), the deadly and mysterious ailment which has no known cure and can only be diagnosed after death. CJD, linked to "mad cow" disease, can incubate for years. Once established, the disease progresses through early signs of depression and personality changes, on to muscle spasms, dementia and death. Since 1974 it has been known that surgical instruments can transmit the disease when a patient contracted CJD with an eye operation. Hospital officials were faced with the horrifying reality that the instruments had been used, laundered, sterilized and reused for eight subsequent surgical patients. After some delay, the university contacted all eight patients. But what now? These patients must feel like they are carrying a time bomb. HCA-Healthcare Co., the hospital chain that owns Tulane University Hospital and Clinic, is vulnerable for extraordinary liability damages.

We Are Going Down The Same Road In Different Directions.

Anyone cruising the interstate highways these days knows there is a growing problem of "road gators" - strips of tire tread and steel belts left behind by disintegrating radial tires. The problem is getting worse. The

volume of tire debris increased by 28% between 1995 and 1998. This is much more than a Ford or Firestone problem. A study by the American Trucking Assn. found the rubber wreckage comes from vehicles of every size and description, and there aren't enough Ford Explorers with Firestone tires in the universe to account for it. Heat is the primary culprit in tread-belt separations, and heat increases with speed, as does centrifugal force. Under-inflated tires run hotter because lacking air, the tire body rolls along with more friction, leaving a bigger footprint in the road. However, SUV drivers like the squishy ride of a softer tire. Moreover, drivers are going faster. In fact, 80% of the Firestone tread separations occurred in four high-speed, hot-weather states. In California the number of drivers cited for exceeding 100 mph has doubled in the last decade. And why not? Today's well-engineered, seat belt and air bag equipped vehicles feel safe going 85 mph on any straight and level road. So, the problem is larger than Ford-Firestone, and cannot be laid to a quality control factor at a single plant in Decatur, Illinois. As usual in the vast majority of motor vehicle debacles, the real problem is the loose nut behind the steering wheel.

Taxation Without Representation Was Tyranny, But It Was A Lot Cheaper.

Who said life was fair? Not Al Gore. According to new IRS statistics posted in Congress's Joint Economic Committee, the top 1% of income earners that candidate Gore is abusing with deprecating tone, actually paid 35% of all federal personal income taxes for 1998, up from 33% for 1997. For 1998, the bottom half of taxpayers paid 4% of the income-tax tab, about the same as each of the past few years. To rank in the top 1% you had to report gross income of \$269,496, and the top 5% reported income of \$114,729, while to rank in the top 10% you had to report \$83,220. These data do not include Social Security and Medicare taxes.

Sometimes Human Existence Is A Colossal Bore.

In Hollywood, Mecca for cosmetic trends, the hottest gimmick to hit the beautification market since the thigh butterfly, is eyebrow shaping. Spend about ten to 30 minutes behind a diaphanous screen, and for \$40 a pop your eyebrows can be reshaped into a Cher look-alike, or whatever. Debates are raging over plucking techniques, whether to use eyebrow wax, and how to use tweezers. Yes, and you can now purchase a coffee-table book "The Eyebrow." Stencils are available with exotic names such as "The Marilyn," "The Pamela," and "The Brooke." Twenty percent of the customers are male, as men are getting into salons looking to tame unruly cilia, and perhaps request the Jack Nicholson or Tom Selleck look. Makeup companies have come out with a raft of brow products, e.g. \$25 Brow Pomade, \$35 After Tweeze Cream, et cetera. Geez, is this narcissism gone crazy, or what?

Sure, You Love Me Before The Big Game, But Will You Respect Me In The Morning?

Historically, coaches have been telling their athletic teams that sex preceding a physical challenge will reduce the game performance. Not so, according to London Marathon. A survey revealed that people who have sex before running a marathon tend to have as much or more spunk than abstainers. On average, those who have sex before running claimed to have better racing times than those who did not. The survey further revealed that fully half of respondents said running had no effect on their sex life, 30% said jogging improved it, while only 8% said it made sexual performance worse.

ADDENDA

- ❖ On September 10, 1885, Dr. Herman Mules created the first glass eye for a patient whose eye he had just eviscerated.
- ❖ People with heart disease are 2.3 times more likely to have a heart attack when they are angry.
- ❖ Prohibition of alcohol went into effect October 1920 and lasted until 1933, considered by many to be the longest 13 years in American history.
- ❖ Bagpipers always walk when they play, trying to get away from that rotten noise.

Aloha and keep the faith —rts■

Contents of this column do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of the Hawaii Ophthalmological Society. Editorial comment is strictly that of the writer.