



❖ WE CAN'T HAVE ANYTHING BOTH WAYS, AND NOT VERY MUCH ONE WAY.

In a precedent-setting change, Medicare has altered its rules allowing senior citizens to pay the difference between the standard lens implant after cataract surgery to the more expensive multi-focal lens. The lens is considered a major advance in improving acuity, but under the old rules, surgeons could not use it for Medicare patients because of the cost. The door is now open for eye surgeons to increase their fees commensurate with the additional pre and post operative management, as well as the increased cost of the implant. Moreover, the significance of the change may well extend to other areas of medical care, such as joint replacement, joint repair, or cardiac implants. For the first time, Medicare has endorsed what is essentially two-tiered medical care for seniors. Like two Roosevelt coins, it's a paradigm change, and ramifications will follow.

❖ OKAY LADY. PUT YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR BACK. YOU GET ONE PHONE CALL.

Two women in California using home-grown marijuana recommended by their doctors, sought an injunction against enforcement of the federal statute regarding controlled substances. Their claim was based upon the *California Compassionate Use Act* (similar laws have been passed in nine other states). The Supreme Court ruled six to three against the LOLs, based upon a 1942 ruling that growing even a little bit of home-grown wheat was a violation of the Interstate Commerce Act. The dissenters, Judges Rehnquist, O'Connor and Thomas (a strange combo) were in support of states' rights, and perhaps the best spokesman for the dissenters was Justice Clarence Thomas. He wrote, "If Congress can regulate this under the Commerce Clause then it can regulate virtually anything, including quilting bees, clothes drives and potluck suppers." The feds promptly began ripping up small pot patches from Vermont to Alaska.

❖ GRANDMA WARNED ME- GO BLIND OR HAVE AN ERECTION? LET ME THINK.

Now it might seem fairly obvious that after suffering transient visual loss on four consecutive occasions after taking a drug, why take it a fifth time? On the last occasion, the vision did not return to normal, and the patient was diagnosed with non-arteritic anterior ischemic optic neuropathy (NAION). The drug was Cialis, and the evidence seems compelling that there is an association. CBS did a news story about the work of Howard Pomeranz, M.D. a fellow at Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, who has collected several cases of NAION which might be related to use of the erectile dysfunction drug Viagra. Pfizer, Inc. maker of Viagra, said it had never detected vision loss in 103 studies of 13,000 patients. The blue vision which has been reported with Viagra is due to a reaction in the retina and unrelated to NAION. So far, the major evidence is temporal, and it isn't clear how an ED drug might precipitate optic nerve ischemia. Moreover, since NAION occurs annually in two or three people per 100,000 over age 50, a Pfizer advisory panel of ophthalmologists concluded that there isn't a problem. Still, the predatory legal hyenas are already circling the ED campfire.

❖ NOTHING THAT WELL MEANING PEOPLE MIGHT DO SHOULD SURPRISE US.

A study funded by the National Institutes of Health published in *Nature* was generated to evaluate ethics of U.S. scientists. Questionnaires went out to a cross-section of NIH funded scientists, including medical research, pure science, chemistry and physics. 3,000 researchers were asked thirty-three questions, ranging from failure to keeping records to "cooking" research data. 0.3% admitted to falsifying data, 1.4% admitted to plagiarism, 8% ignored some rules designed to protect human volunteers, 6% failed to present data that contradicted one's own previous research, one-third said they failed to keep adequate records of research projects, and about half the respondents confessed to careless behavior, such as cutting corners. Wow! And these are just the scientists who returned the survey.

❖ THE CANADIAN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM HAS ONE MINOR FLAW. IT DOESN'T WORK.

A landmark judicial decision was handed down by Canada's Supreme Court when the judges struck down a provincial law that forbade care outside of the universal health care law. The decision will allow patients to seek private care wherever they wish. The complaint was launched in 1997 when a patient had to wait over a year for a hip replacement. Plodding through the legal system where two Quebec courts upheld the ban on private insurance,

the issue got to the Supreme Court in 2004. The jurists ruminated for a full year, and then ruled against the Quebec government, noting that delays cause an increased risk of mortality, that injuries may become irreparable, and non-urgent waiting lists cause pain to patients who cannot fully enjoy any real quality of life. The change takes place immediately. It is expected that similar legal challenges will follow in other provinces, and physicians will leave the national plan and move into more lucrative private practices. The potential outcome is that the universal health plan will fall apart.

❖ WE ARE BORN WET, COLD AND NAKED. THEN THINGS GET WORSE.

Collecting data back to 1990, Dr. George Bonanno, clinical professor of psychology and associates at Columbia University, interviewed hundreds of mourners, and presented their findings at the American Psychiatric Association annual meeting. The research shows pretty clearly that the more people focus on loss, the more prolonged their grief will be. Many holocaust survivors found they could only rebuild their lives by burying the horrors, not sitting in circles reliving the murders. Humans are generally quite resilient, and 85% of people adequately cope with their grief within a year or two. Some hospitals take pictures of infants who die shortly after birth, and give to the parents as a "keepsake." In Fountain Valley, California, when a hospital sent photos of their dead daughter, posed on a velvet sheet, to bereaved parents, they found the pictures emotionally distressing and filed a lawsuit (settled out of court). Hospital policy was changed. Our culture has made great strides in helping people face death and dying, but an industry with staging and rituals does not appear to be useful.

❖ A FEATHER IS KINKY. THE WHOLE CHICKEN IS PERVERTED.

A case report in the *American Journal of Forensic Pathology* related to unusual sexual stimulus activity. A young man appeared in the hospital emergency room complaining of a rectal impaction. Examination revealed a cement obstruction. Additional history was that while mixing some concrete, the patient's friend succeeded in pouring cement through a funnel into the patient, and that it hardened more quickly than expected. Catheters were inserted around the foreign body to distend the tissue, and a cement cast of the patient's rectum was removed without incident. Subsequent examination revealed no serious injury, except to the patient's dignity. Don't try this at home!

❖ THIS IS VERY DIFFICULT. LET'S WORK IT OUT WITH A CAT PSYCHIC.

A Nevada taxidermist was making pillows from the fur of her clients dead pets. Her customers were quite satisfied and relished being able to still get close to fluffy or fido. "Most people like having their cat on the sofa." But, no activity is safe from meddling, self appointed PC do-gooders. The taxidermist received a barrage of hate mail, and has temporarily suspended pillow stuffing. What's the problem? The cat is dead!

❖ WITH A NAME LIKE SMUCKERS, IT'S GOTTA BE GOOD.

In Kentucky, a woman went to her doctor complaining of a purple vaginal discharge. Further inquiry revealed that the patient had recently been fitted with a diaphragm. She claimed that she followed instructions as she was advised, including use of "the jelly." When asked what kind of jelly, she said, "grape."

ADDENDA

- ❖ The words absent, departed, truant, deserted, lost, gone, dead, omitted, etc. have all been replaced in current media jargon by "went missing." Grammarians must grit their teeth.
- ❖ On average, U.S. hospitals treat 120 toilet seat related injuries each year.
- ❖ Galileo's best telescope was about as powerful as a good pair of binoculars today.
- ❖ Handsome dude -- "Hey Baby, how do you like your eggs in the morning?" Smart girl -- "Unfertilized. Beat it!"

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.*