



MARCH is ETHICS AWARENESS MONTH!

**All of the following news stories are taken from recent headlines and have interesting ethical aspects.
Please enjoy Week 4**

The Clinical Ethics Center at Memorial Medical Center was established in 1995 in cooperation with the Department of Medical Humanities of Southern Illinois University School of Medicine. Located in the B145 area, the Center's staff are available for ethics consultations Monday – Saturday and are on-call after hours for emergencies.

Reform: President Barack Obama signed into law on Tuesday a package of final changes to his landmark overhaul of the U.S. healthcare system, hailing it as an "important milestone" for reform. "It represents a major step forward," Obama told a college audience in Virginia, just outside Washington, after lawmakers last week put the finishing touches on healthcare legislation, including reforms in college student loan programs. The signing capped a yearlong political struggle between Obama's Democrats and opposition Republicans that has set the stage for a bitter campaign for control of Congress in November.

Flu Fightin' Fallout: The H1N1 swine flu virus can develop resistance quickly to antivirals used to treat it, U.S. doctors reported. Government researchers reported Friday on the cases of two people with compromised immune systems who developed drug-resistant strains of virus after less than two weeks on therapy. "While the emergence of drug-resistant influenza virus is not in itself surprising, these cases demonstrate that resistant strains can emerge after only a brief period of drug therapy," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

Laconic Lizards: Lizards are not the most loquacious of animals. They don't vocalize to communicate with other members of the same species. Researchers in Japan supply one answer: to eavesdrop on other animals; they describe how the Madagascan spiny-tailed iguana overhears the alarm calls of nearby birds to protect itself from predators. Iguanas responded to flycatcher alarm calls, becoming more vigilant. The Madagascan Iguana is only the second iguana known to eavesdrop, but findings suggest that the behavior may be widespread in lizards.

Cold Hearted: Therapeutic hypothermia, a relatively new treatment for cardiac arrest, involves cooling one's body to about 91 degrees F — about 7 degrees below normal body temperature, aims to slow brain-cell death and other organ demise that could lead to permanent neurological damage. In 2005, the American Heart Association issued recommendations and guidelines for inducing mild hypothermia in comatose survivors of cardiac arrest. Since then, the number of hospitals offering the treatment has climbed. Almost 500 of about 5,000 hospitals across the country are doing it.

Internet Relief: For many people, social networks are a place for idle chatter about what they made for dinner or sharing cute pictures of their pets. But for people living with chronic diseases or disabilities, they play a more vital role. People fighting chronic illnesses are more likely to blog or participate in online discussions about health problems, according to a report released Wednesday by the Pew Internet and American Life Project and the California HealthCare Foundation. "If they can break free from the anchors holding them down, people living with chronic disease who go online are finding resources that are more useful than the rest of the population," said Susannah Fox, associate director of digital strategy at Pew and author of the report.

Rx: Legal-aid: The doctors at Children's Hospital in West Virginia recognizing that medical care alone is not enough to address the health woes of the poor -which are often related to diet, living conditions and stress - started using a protocol 18 months ago that resulted in 500 referrals to legal aid. A survey of patients (nearly all on Medicaid) found that 28% of families had their gas or electricity cut off in the previous year and 23% had doubled up in housing or moved to cheaper residences. One mother in three said they had sometimes run out of baby formula without money to buy more.

Family Fight: *Family Guy*, an animated sitcom known for its brutally explicit satire, began an episode with elementary school kids acting out a performance called Terri Schiavo: the Musical, making a parody of her 2005 death. Bobby Schindler, Schiavo's brother, hopes to generate enough protests to cost the show some sponsors. But one of the venues that offered the Schindler family some support during the fight over Schiavo's feeding tube may not be so friendly now. Fox News Channel is a sister company of the network that airs *Family Guy*. But such portrayals don't always draw anger. The son of infomercialist Billy Mays complimented the producers of *South Park* when it poked fun at him after his unexpected death last year.

Dieting by Guilt: New York City health officials won a big victory when a federal judge upheld a regulation requiring chain restaurants with at least 15 outlets nationwide to post calories on menus. Customers agree that the listings are a good idea; others thought the rule was unnecessary. A researcher at the Center for Consumer Freedom called the regulation, “dieting by guilt.” NYC Health Commissioner said, “People can do whatever they want to do with the information...people still choose to smoke even though the surgeon general’s warning is on the pack.”

Right as Rain: Eco-friendly tourists flock the city to understand how Portland’s (OR) innovative system of curbs, gutters, roofs and rain gardens sharply cuts water pollution. Storm-water runoff is the No. 1 cause of water pollution in suburban and rural areas. A half-inch of rain on a Wal-Mart parking lot generates 250,000 gallons of water. What Portland is doing: disconnecting residential gutter downspouts from storm-water system, rooftop gardens which capture 80% of rainfall, curbing extensions that contain trees or native plants, and using credits & fees. Portland-style storm-water control is catching on in many cities, including Chicago.

Magnetism & Moral Compasses: MIT neuroscientists have shown they can influence people's moral judgments by disrupting a specific brain region -- a finding that helps reveal how the brain constructs morality. In the new study, the researchers disrupted activity in the right temporo-parietal junction (TPJ) by inducing a current in the brain using a magnetic field applied to the scalp. They found that the subjects' ability to make moral judgments that require an understanding of other people's intentions -- for example, a failed murder attempt -- was impaired. Researchers found that when the right TPJ was disrupted, subjects were more likely to judge failed attempts to harm as morally permissible.

Mommas’ Boys: New research from the University of Reading says that children, especially boys, who have insecure attachments to their mothers in the early years have more behavior problems later in childhood. The quality of the relationship between children and their parents is important to children's development, but past research on the link between attachment and development has been inconsistent. The new research sought to clarify the extent to which bonds between children and their mothers early in life affect children's later behavioral problems, such as aggression or hostility.

Counter Intuitive: Having a large number of supportive relatives increases the fear of dying among the elderly from ethnic minority groups, suggests research in *Postgraduate Medical Journal*. This runs counter to the perception that a network of supportive informal family caregivers eases the fear of death, say the authors. More than three out of four (77%) of the sample, which included people of Indian, Pakistani, Black Caribbean, and Chinese ethnicities, had up to four extreme fears around death. These included fear of the mode of death, fear of not being able to control their death, fear of dying itself, and fear of being in pain. Having more relatives to help out with practical tasks, if needed, increased fears in three of these four domains.

Fear Factor: Family violence experts estimate that more than half of children exposed to intimate partner violence experience trauma symptoms, such as bad dreams, nightmares and trying to forget about the fights. If children feel threatened by even very low levels of violence between their parents, they may be at increased risk for developing trauma symptoms, new research suggests. A study by psychologists at Southern Methodist University in Dallas found that children who witness violence between their mother and her intimate partner report fewer trauma symptoms if they don't perceive the violence as threatening.

Weighing Benefits: Dieters are often advised to stop drinking alcohol to avoid the extra calories lurking in a glass of wine or a favorite cocktail. New research suggests that women who regularly consume moderate amounts of alcohol are less likely to gain weight than nondrinkers and are at lower risk for obesity. Although moderate drinking is associated with better heart health, regular drinking also increases breast cancer risk. There may be differences in how men and women metabolize alcohol.

Join members of the Clinical Ethics Staff to discuss the hidden, and not so hidden, ethical issues in these and other news stories. Bring your ideas and your lunch to B115 from 11:30am – 12:00Noon on March 31, 2010.