



## 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.*

**Doctor Who?** Sweden's most prestigious medical school has found itself in an international uproar after it unknowingly admitted a student who was a Nazi sympathizer and a convicted murderer. He entered Karolinska in fall 2007 while still on probation, having earned credits for medical school while in prison. In contrast with the United States, Swedish laws and customs are sympathetic to released offenders, saying that once they have served their time they should be treated like ordinary citizens. But the case has raised questions about who is fit to become a doctor and about protecting the rights of patients, fellow medical students, and health care workers.

**Feel My Pain:** A 31-year-old Iranian woman is demanding the ancient punishment of "an eye for an eye," and wants to blind the man who blinded her by throwing acid in her face when she rejected his advances. "I don't want to blind him for revenge," she said. "I'm doing this to prevent it from happening to someone else. People like him should be made to feel my suffering." The man turned himself in to police and confessed in court, but his lawyer says he has never shown any remorse. "He says he did it because he loved her."

**Proving It:** The \$787 billion economic stimulus bill approved by Congress will, for the first time, provide substantial amounts of money for the federal government to compare the effectiveness of different treatments for the same illness. Under the legislation, researchers will receive \$1.1 billion to compare drugs, medical devices, surgery and other ways of treating specific conditions. The program responds to a growing concern that doctors have little or no solid evidence of the value of many treatments. Supporters of the research hope it will eventually save money by discouraging the use of costly, ineffective treatments.

**Ebola Scare:** In a nightmare scenario, on March 12 a scientist in Germany accidentally pricked her finger on with a needle used to inject the deadly Ebola virus into lab mice. Within hours, members of a tightly bound community of virologists, biologists and others were gathered in a trans-Atlantic telephone conference trying to map out a way to save her life. Within 48 hours of the accident, the 45-year-old scientist was injected with an experimental vaccine from Canada, never before tried on humans, and so far the scientist shows no symptoms.

**Fluffy and Fido Falls:** Cats and dogs are a factor in more than 86,000 serious falls each year, according to the first government study of pet-related tumbles. Although such incidents account for just about 1 percent of injuries from falls, researchers concluded that about 3 out of every 10,000 people annually suffer fall-related injuries from cats or dogs that are serious enough to send someone to the hospital. The rate was nearly twice as high for people 75 and older, and women were two times more likely to be injured than men.

**Brain Drain:** The health care costs of Alzheimer's disease patients are more than triple those of other older people, and that doesn't even include the billions of hours of unpaid care from family members, a new report by the Alzheimer's Association suggests. Compared with people aged 65 and older without Alzheimer's, those with the disease are hospitalized much more often and treated in skilled-nursing centers. That all adds up to at least \$33,007 in annual costs per patient, compared with \$10,603 for an older person without Alzheimer's.

**Personal Effects?** Police have apologized to a widow for giving her the rope her husband had used to kill himself. Police had given the woman three bags containing her husband's laptop, wallet and briefcase, but when she looked in the bags she noticed the rope. "I saw a yellow color and realized what I had in my hand. I went to pieces and I just sunk to the floor," she said. The police chief said the officers concerned would be "spoken to" and steps would be taken to ensure it never happened again.

**Lending A Hand:** Surgeons in Pittsburgh have transplanted a hand onto a Marine who was hurt in a training accident, and he has some movement in his fingers, according to the hospital. The Marine will undergo intense daily physical therapy for three months to gain movement. The surgery is only the sixth in U.S. history. The other five have occurred at Jewish Hospital Heart and Lung Center of Louisville, Ky. The first hand transplant was done in Ecuador in 1964, but the patient's body rejected the hand after two weeks.

**Surgical Vaccine?** Circumcision not only protects against HIV in heterosexual men, but it also helps prevent two other sexually transmitted infections, according to findings reported in the New England Journal of Medicine. Circumcised males reduced their risk of infection with human papillomavirus by 35 percent, and herpes by 28 percent. However, researchers found circumcision had no effect on the transmission of syphilis. Although the American Academy of Pediatrics previously said there was not enough evidence to recommend routine circumcision of infants, the doctor's group is reviewing its position based on recent studies.

**Suds Smugglers:** The quest for squeaky-clean dishes has turned some law-abiding people in Washington into dishwasher-detergent smugglers. They are bringing Cascade or Electrasol in from out of state because the eco-friendly varieties required under Washington state law don't work as well. Washington has the nation's strictest ban on dishwasher detergent made with phosphates, a measure aimed at reducing water pollution. Phosphates — the main cleaning agent in many detergents and household cleaners — break down grease and remove stains. However, the chemicals are difficult to remove in wastewater treatment plants and often wind up in rivers and lakes.

**Sexting:** A 14-year-old New Jersey girl has been accused of child pornography after posting nearly 30 explicit nude pictures of herself on MySpace.com — charges that could force her to register as a sex offender if convicted. The girl posted the photos because she wanted her boyfriend to see them. Called "sexting" when it's done by cell phone, teenagers' habit of sending sexually suggestive photos of themselves and others to one another is a nationwide problem that has confounded parents, school administrators and law enforcers. Prosecutors in states including Pennsylvania, Connecticut, North Dakota, Ohio, Utah, Vermont, Virginia and Wisconsin have tried stop it by charging teens who send and receive the pictures.

**Too Far:** Germany's highest court has ruled that a PETA ad campaign comparing animal slaughterhouses to the Holocaust is an offense against human dignity. The 2003 campaign used eight, 60-square-foot (5.6-sq. meter) panels depicting images of factory farms next to Jewish concentration camp inmates and the slogan "Holocaust on your plate." The Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe on Thursday ruled that the ad campaign was not protected under freedom of speech laws. PETA — People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals — claimed its goal was to compare Nazi-run concentration camps with contemporary animal abuse.

**Death Risk:** The HealthGrades Annual Hospital Quality and Clinical Excellence study found Medicare patients treated at top-rated hospitals nationwide are 27 percent less likely to die, on average, than those admitted to all other hospitals. The 2009 study of Medicare patients found that 152,666 lives may have been saved and 11,772 major complications avoided during the three years studied, had the quality of care at all hospitals matched the level of those in the top five percent.

**Abstinence and Monogamy:** One of the world's most prestigious medical journals, the Lancet, has accused Pope Benedict XVI of distorting science in his remarks on condom use. It said the Pope's recent comments that condoms exacerbated the problem of HIV/Aids were wildly inaccurate and could have devastating consequences. Speaking during his first visit to Africa, the Pope said HIV/Aids was "a tragedy that cannot be overcome by money alone, that cannot be overcome through the distribution of condoms, which can even increase the problem". The Pope said "the traditional teaching of the Church has proven to be the only failsafe way to prevent the spread of HIV/Aids".

**Let Us Help:** The United Nations Security Council has called on Sudan to reconsider its decision to expel foreign aid agencies from the troubled Darfur region. Sudan's President Bashir gave the order after the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued the arrest warrant for him in early March, on charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes - the first such warrant for a serving president. According to the UN, up to 300,000 people have been killed in the conflict and 2.7 million driven from their homes. Sudan said the humanitarian situation is under control and its decision is irreversible.

**Broken Hearts:** Stress following Hurricane Katrina may still be causing heart attacks years after the storm. Doctors at Tulane University Hospital and Clinics found there was a threefold increase in the rate of heart attacks treated at the hospital since the 2005 storm. Many studies have documented increases in heart attacks after a major catastrophe, but this may be the first finding of such an increase more than two years later. Post-Katrina heart attack patients also were more likely to need surgery and less likely to have jobs or medical insurance than their pre-storm counterparts.

**Carrying a Torch:** International torch relays ahead of the Olympics have been scrapped by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). It follows the controversy that surrounded the Beijing Olympic relay. Instead of representing a symbol of hope and inspiration, the Olympic torch became a magnet for protesters in 2008 en route to Beijing, sparking sometimes violent protests over China's human rights record. IOC executive director Gilbert Felli said: "After the (2004) relay in Athens, which was the first international relay, we came to the conclusion it was easier for the torch to stay inside the (host) country."

**An Apple a Day:** Doctors are puzzling over what seems to be an increase in the number of children with kidney stones, an extremely painful condition some blame on kids' love of cheeseburgers, fries and other salty foods. Eating too much salt can result in excess calcium in the urine, and most children's stones are calcium based. The best prevention is avoiding salt in the diet and drinking plenty of water, so that the minerals in urine stay dissolved.