



MARCH is ETHICS AWARENESS MONTH!

All of the following news stories are taken from recent headlines and have interesting ethical aspects.

Please enjoy Week 3.

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.

Doc-in-a-Box: Patients with a sore throat, high fever or mystery rash in Hawaii will now be able to bypass the waiting room and find a physician's care just a click away. Doctors are making online house calls in a program that some believe could be a groundbreaking step in health care. Computers equipped with a Web camera are used to set up a live, face-to-face consultation where patients describe their symptoms and show anything from a rash to a wound. They can get questions answered, get advice, or get prescriptions for anything but controlled substances.

Hello Kitty: Japan's iconic Hello Kitty has been recruited to help calm anxious mothers at a maternity hospital in Taiwan where the cartoon image adorns everything from walls to newborns' blankets. First-time father Chen Wen-sheng said, "The place is quite pretty, and warm and fuzzy like Hello Kitty should be." But Angela Lee, a marketing professor at Northwestern University, said the idea of a cartoon themed hospital was "controversial" because some people are bound to "think the entire hospital is like a theme park."

Tan Ban: Texas is considering a bill where teens under 18 would not be allowed to use tanning beds unless they have a doctor's note and a parent present. Lawmakers heard from doctors who said the bill is a good idea because of the dangers of ultraviolet light in increasing the risk of melanoma. Texas already requires parental permission for people younger than 18 to use tanning beds. Those under 16 have to have a parent at the salon while they are tanning, and anyone younger than 13 needs a doctor's note.

An Eye On You: A Canadian filmmaker plans to have a mini camera installed in his prosthetic eye to make documentaries. Rob Spence, 36, lost an eye in an accident as a teen-ager. "Originally the whole idea was to do a documentary about surveillance. In Toronto there are 12,000 cameras. But the strange thing I discovered was that people were more concerned about me and my secret camera eye because they feel that is a worse invasion of their privacy. I don't want to go into a locker room or show me going to the bathroom."

Sports Injuries: Researchers have found evidence that athletes who suffered a concussion during their earlier sporting life show a mental and physical decline more than 30 years later. The author of the study said it shows that the effects of sports concussions can cause cognitive and motor function alterations as the athletes age. "In the light of these findings, athletes should be better informed about the cumulative and persistent effects of sports concussion on mental and physical processes so that they know about the risks associated with returning to their sport."

Baby Boom: With 4.3 million births, more babies entered the U.S in 2007 than any other year in the nation's history. In an encouraging development, the rate of premature births and low birthweight babies declined, but Cesarean deliveries rose for an 11th straight year to a new high of 32% of births. A record 40% of babies were born to unmarried women, including 72% of black babies and 52% of Hispanic babies, the CDC report found. Ending 14 years of declines, the teen birth rate increased 5%.

Security Threat: Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano told lawmakers in February that the agency cannot meet its 2012 deadline for screening all cargo coming into the U.S. for radiological and nuclear materials. A law passed by Congress in 2007 requires the Homeland Security Department to screen all cargo headed for the United States by 2012. About 11.5 million containers come into the U.S. each year. Among the major obstacles to meeting the deadline is deploying trained U.S. officials to more than 700 foreign ports to operate scanning equipment.

God Squad: A Vatican-backed conference on evolution is under attack from people who weren't invited to participate: those espousing creationism and intelligent design. Intelligent design holds that certain features of life forms are so complex that they can best be explained by an origin from an intelligent higher power, not an undirected process like natural selection. Organizers of the conference said that they wanted an intellectually rigorous conference on science, theology and philosophy to mark the 150th anniversary of Charles Darwin's "The Origin of Species," and intelligent design didn't fit the bill.

Cause of Burnout: Doctors report that about one in six patients is "difficult." A study in Archives of Internal Medicine found more than one in three doctors said the most frustrating patient is one who insists on being prescribed an unnecessary drug. About 16 percent of doctors said they frequently saw patients who were unhappy with their care. About 14 percent of physicians say they regularly see patients who have unrealistic expectations for their care. The researchers noted that older, more experienced practitioners are likely better at dealing with unhappy patients.

Tooth Fairy Challenge: Ever wonder why sharks get several rows of teeth and people only get one? A single gene appears to be in charge and when scientists bred mice that lacked that gene, the rodents developed extra teeth next to their first molars - backups like sharks and other non-mammals grow, report University of Rochester scientists. If wondering about shark teeth seems rather wonky, consider: Tooth loss from gum disease is a major problem, here and abroad. Now it might be possible to trigger a new tooth to grow.

Childhood Infections: In January, researchers said they found an "alarming" increase in children's ear, nose and throat infections nationwide caused by dangerous drug-resistant staph germs. Other studies have shown rising numbers of skin infections in adults and children caused by these germs, nicknamed MRSA, but this is the first nationwide report on how common they are in deeper tissue infections in the head and neck, the study authors said. These include certain ear and sinus infections, and abscesses that can form in the tonsils and throat.

Is There a Doctor? Health care in America cost about \$2.4 trillion annually, or about \$8,000 for each of the nation's 300 million residents. A quarter century ago, experts blamed rising health costs on a surplus of doctors. They said doctors seeking income would perform unneeded procedures, making medical care more expensive. In response, medical schools capped or cut enrollments. But recently, doctors and medical school groups began warning of a large shortfall in coming decades where the U.S. will have about 159,000 fewer doctors than it needs, causing many medical schools to consider expansion despite the economic recession.

Deep Breath: Bush administration standards for pollutants like soot are "contrary to law and unsupported by adequately reasoned decisionmaking," a federal appeals court said in February. The court ordered the Environmental Protection Agency to reconsider its standards for the pollutants, fine particulates, which are linked to premature death from lung cancer and heart disease and to other health problems including asthma. When the agency embraced the standards in 2006, its own scientific staff rejected them as too lax. The decision is "a victory for the breathing public," said Earthjustice.

Fake Food: Foods masquerading as something else — a more nutritious something else — have been big news in the past two years. Experts say there are few dangerous U.S.-produced foods, but producers have been known to practice "economic adulteration" — adding a little to their bottom line by padding, thinning or substituting something cheap for something expensive. Fish is the most frequently faked food Americans buy. In the business, it's called "species adulteration" — selling a cheaper fish such as pen-raised Atlantic salmon as wild Alaska salmon. Other commonly faked foods include olive oil, honey, maple syrup, and vanilla.

Invisibility Cloak: They can't match Harry Potter yet, but scientists are moving closer to creating a real cloak of invisibility. Researchers at Duke University, who developed a material that can "cloak" an item from detection by microwaves, report that they have expanded the number of wavelengths they can block. The team reported they had developed so-called metamaterials that could deflect microwaves around a three-dimensional object, essentially making it invisible to the waves. The system works like a mirage, where heat causes the bending of light rays and cloaks the road ahead behind an image of the sky

Human Rights Violation: The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda on Thursday convicted the "mastermind" of the Rwandan genocide and sentenced him to life in prison for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. It is the first time the tribunal has convicted high-level officials for the 100-day genocide in 1994 which left an estimated 800,000 people dead. Theoneste Bagosora, 67, a colonel in the Rwandan army, was found guilty along with two other men — Major Aloys Ntabakuze and Lieutenant Colonel Anatole Nsengiyumva. All were sentenced to life in prison.

Third-Hand Smoke: There is plenty of evidence that "second-hand" smoke - breathed when you are in the same room as someone smoking - can be harmful. However, Professor Jonathan Winickoff, from Massachusetts General Hospital, says toxic particles in cigarette smoke can remain on nearby surfaces as well as the hair and clothing of the smoker, long after the cigarette has been put out. Small children are particularly susceptible to this third-hand smoke because they are likely to breathe in close proximity, or even lick and suck on items with the toxic particles.

Casualties of War: As of Thursday, March 19, 2009, at least 4,259 members of the U.S. military had died in the Iraq war since it began in March 2003, according to an Associated Press count. The British military has reported 179 deaths; Italy, 33; Ukraine, 18; Poland, 21; Bulgaria, 13; Spain, 11; Denmark, seven; El Salvador, five; Slovakia, four; Latvia and Georgia, three each; Estonia, Netherlands, Thailand and Romania, two each; and Australia, Hungary, Kazakhstan and South Korea, one death each.