



MARCH is ETHICS AWARENESS MONTH!

*All of the following news stories are taken from recent headlines and have interesting ethical aspects.
Please enjoy Week 2.*

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.

Death Penalty Dies: After decades of moral arguments and journeys to the nation's highest court, the death penalty may be abandoned by several states for a reason having nothing to do with right or wrong: Money. Turns out, it is cheaper to imprison killers for life than to execute them. "It's 10 times more expensive to kill them than to keep them alive," though most Americans believe the opposite, said a former California jurist known as "The Hanging Judge of Orange County" for sending nine men to death row. Legal costs are too great and produce no result, lawmakers say.

I Play One on TV: How many of you think those doctors you see in commercials are really doctors? Well, just in case, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers Association now says that direct-to-consumer drug ads should note when an actor is playing a doctor. Or, if a doctor is getting paid to play a doctor on TV, the ad should note that, too. Additionally, celebrity spokespeople should really believe what they're saying, and TV commercials or print ads should run during programs or in publications whose audiences are 18 or older. In other words, no erectile dysfunction commercials during cartoons.

Got Penicillin? Decades ago, most pills consumed in the United States were made here. But like other manufacturing operations, drug plants have been moving to Asia because of labor, construction, regulatory and environmental costs. But now experts and lawmakers are growing concerned about national security saying that the nation is too reliant on medicine from abroad, and calling for a law that would require certain critical drugs be made or stockpiled in the United States. In drug applications to the FDA in 2007, only 13 percent of the pharmaceutical plants were in the United States.

Diverse Doctoring: A new study reveals Medicare costs vary wildly across the country, with the government paying twice as much for treating a patient in Miami as in San Francisco. The dramatic cost differences don't appear connected to climate or to who lives where, and people in the more expensive areas don't get better care. The study said the differences in spending from one area to another can be blamed on decisions made by individual doctors who are influenced by what medical services are available nearby. "Technology doesn't drive the growth in health care spending, people do."

Multi-tasking: A 39 year-old Ohio mother spotted breast-feeding a youngster and talking on a phone while driving has pleaded not guilty to charges of child endangering and unlawful child restraint. Police filed the misdemeanor charges after a motorist saw the woman on Feb. 26. Authorities used a license plate number to track her down. Police say the woman told them she was breast-feeding and wouldn't let her child go hungry. She faces up to 180 days in jail and a \$1,800 fine if convicted.

Fleeced: The University of Michigan announced in February that it was ending its apparel licensing agreement with the Russell Corporation, becoming the 12th university to do so in response to the company's decision to close a unionized factory in Honduras. University of Michigan officials said an agreement under which Russell made T-shirts, sweatshirts and fleeces with university logos would end as of March 31 because Russell had violated the university's code of conduct calling on licensees to guarantee the basic rights of workers.

Soldiers' Honor: News organizations will be allowed to photograph the homecomings of America's war dead under a new Pentagon policy, defense and congressional officials said in February. The current photography ban was put in place in 1991 by President George H.W. Bush. A leading military families group said that the policy, enforced without exception during George W. Bush's presidency, should be changed so that survivors of the dead can decide whether photographers can record their return.

Guilty Pleasure: Americans like their toilet tissue soft. The national obsession with soft paper has driven the growth of brands like Cottonelle Ultra, Quilted Northern Ultra and Charmin Ultra, but fluffiness comes at the price of millions of harvested trees. Although toilet tissue can be made at similar cost from recycled material, it is the fiber taken from standing trees that helps give it that plush feel. Customers "demand soft and comfortable," said a spokesman. "Recycled fiber cannot do it." Americans use an average of 23.6 rolls per person a year.

Busted Leg: Spanish police arrested a 66-year-old Chilean who tried to smuggle drugs into Barcelona with a cast made of cocaine fitted on a truly broken leg. His left shin was broken, and investigators do not rule out the possibility that the injury was inflicted intentionally so he could smuggle with the cocaine cast. A police spokesman said this was the first time officials had seen a cast made entirely of compressed cocaine. It weighed about 2.2 pounds. The man was taken to a hospital after the cast was removed.

Raising the Bar: The World Anti-Doping Agency (Wada) confirmed it is considering whether to include Viagra (sildenafil) in its list of banned substances in international sports. As well as boosting the blood supply to muscles - helpful in sprinting - the drug may also enhance endurance, especially when competitors are breathing in polluted conditions or at high altitudes. Wada updates its list of prohibited drugs annually and could add Viagra before the Games in London in 2012. No action can currently be taken on athletes who have Viagra in their system because it is not illegal.

Money's Worth: Publicly funded family planning prevents nearly 2 million unintended pregnancies and more than 800,000 abortions in the United States each year, saving billions of dollars, according to new research by the Guttmacher Institute, a reproductive-health think tank. Report co-author Rachel Benson Gold called the family planning program "smart government at its best," asserting that every dollar spent on it saves taxpayers \$4 in costs associated with unintended births to mothers eligible for Medicaid-funded natal care. Despite such arguments, federal funding for family planning is a divisive issue.

Suicide Society: Final Exit Network's medical director and regional coordinator were arrested in February and charged with assisted suicide in the death of a Georgia man last June. Investigators say the organization may have been involved in as many as 200 other deaths around the country, and say the group advocated a suicide technique using helium, which cannot be detected in an autopsy, and "exit bags" placed over the head. "These are not people who are running from justice, these are people who want justice," the defense attorney told a judge.

Mixed Message: In the United States, the world's largest market for illicit drugs, the number of teenagers abusing them fell between 2001 and 2007. But the number of people abusing prescription drugs rose, the U.N. International Narcotics Control Board said in its annual report in February. There are an estimated 19.9 million Americans aged 12 years or older who are considered current illicit drug users. An estimate from 2002 on the cost of drug abuse to the U.S. economy in lost productivity and health care was \$181 billion.

Easy Test Hope: A new study in the journal Nature suggests that a simple urine test may one day tell men whether they have prostate cancer that can be ignored or must be aggressively treated. Currently men must undergo a series of diagnostic tests, including a surgical biopsy, to confirm prostate cancer. The new study links specific molecules produced by the body to the aggressive form of the disease, suggesting that detecting these molecules could one day lead to a reliable diagnosis of prostate cancer and a prognosis for patients.

Virtually Safer: Facebook has removed more than 5,500 convicted sex offenders from its social networking Web site since May, Connecticut's attorney general said in February. Earlier, rival networking site MySpace announced it had removed 90,000 sex offenders in a two-year period. Last year, the attorney general got both sites to implement dozens of safeguards, including finding better ways to verify users' ages and putting limits on older users' ability to search the profiles of members under 18.

Bug Buster: An unexpectedly high number of visits to emergency departments are related to adverse reactions from antibiotics, accounting for almost one in five medication-related visits, according to a study by CDC scientists in the journal Clinical Infectious Diseases. The researchers say about 142,500 visits to emergency departments each year are connected with adverse reactions to antibiotics. The researchers estimate that there are about 10.5 adverse events -- serious enough to end in a visit to the ER -- for every 10,000 antibiotic prescriptions written.

Poverty Penalty: Eight members of a young man's poverty-ridden family were shot and beheaded before their bodies were thrown into a river in eastern India after the man secretly married a wealthy girl. The weekend killing took place after 21-year-old Ratan Mandal eloped with 18-year-old Kanchan Kumari and got married secretly, afraid their families would never approve due to an old social rivalry. Police have charged 15 people, mostly from the girl's family, with the murders.

Less Stress: Playing the computer puzzle game Tetris can help reduce the effects of traumatic stress, UK researchers say. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can affect anyone who has suffered a sudden and shocking incident. One of its main features is the "flashback", in which the distressing sights, sounds or smells of the incident can return in everyday life. Volunteers immediately given the game to play had fewer "flashbacks," perhaps because it helped disrupt the laying down of memories. It is hoped the study could aid the development of new strategies for minimizing the impact of trauma.