

Ethics Noon News



Clinical Ethics Center March 2, 2005

MARCH is ETHICS AWARENESS MONTH!

All of the following news stories have interesting ethical aspects. Please enjoy Week 1.

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 222 Medical Arts Building, the Center's staff are available for questions or consultations M-F 8:30am – 5:00pm and are on-call after hours for emergencies.

Where There's Smoke, You're Fired: After a one-year notice, Michigan company Weyco, Inc. fired all employees who refused a medical test to determine if they smoked tobacco, even during non-company time, in an effort to lower healthcare costs. Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia have enacted laws protecting smokers, but in the rest of the country, including Michigan, kicking smokers to the curb is perfectly legal. Many are worried about the trajectory of such policies saying childbirth, obesity, inherited gene traits, even sitting in the sun carry health-care risks.

Body Fat Report Cards: A Texas senator wants schools to weigh and measure students' body fat and include the body mass index information on report cards. The senator said parents and educators should be just as concerned with a student's physical health as their academic performance. Opponents of the bill argue it is demeaning and counterproductive. They argue government resources are better used in public health education campaigns that give parents useful resources for treating the problem -- like information on how to shop for healthy foods and how to exercise with their children.

Human-Animal Chimera: At Stanford University in California an experiment might be done later this year to create mice with human brains. Scientists feel that, the more humanlike the animal, the better research model it makes for testing drugs or possibly growing "spare parts," such as livers, to transplant into humans. In Minnesota last year researchers at the Mayo Clinic created pigs with human blood flowing through their bodies.

Your eBay on Drugs: A MSNBC investigation found dozens of items that appeared to be anabolic steroids were advertised and sold on eBay. A few of the auctions occurred in the open but many used the simple ruse of listing the drugs as "books about steroids" to avoid detection by the site's security team. Products included injectable solutions in factory packaging, oral tablets labeled in Spanish as being for veterinary use, and unmarked pills in a plastic bag.

Really Fresh Breath: A woman who pleaded guilty to driving while drunk on three glasses of Listerine was sentenced last month to two years of probation. Officials suspected the defendant, 50, was intoxicated after she rear-ended another vehicle at a red light in January. Police found a bottle of the mouthwash in her car. Her blood alcohol level was .30%, more than three times the legal limit. According to Listerine manufacturer Pfizer Inc., original formula Listerine contains 26.9% alcohol, more than four times that of many malt liquors, while other varieties contain 21.6% alcohol.

Monday, Monday: The stress of returning to work on a Monday morning can trigger a dangerous increase in blood pressure, according to a study published in the *American Journal of Hypertension*. It may explain why deaths from heart attacks and strokes tend to peak on a Monday morning. There are 20% more heart attacks on Mondays than on any other day.

Put Down the Fries: Partially hydrogenated oil has been the food industry's favorite cooking medium for decades. It makes French fries crisp and sweets creamy, and keeps packaged pastries fresh for months. Studies now show this trans fat has the same heart-clogging properties as saturated fat and it reduces the good cholesterol that can clear arteries. The Food and Drug Administration has declared that there is no healthy level in the diet and has ordered food companies to disclose trans fat amounts on food labels by January 2006.

CASE STUDY (see reverse for enter and win details): Tampa's *Tribune* reports Alex Crionas is being refused a direct kidney donation from a willing donor (a friend of four months) because, two years ago, Alex set up a website, <http://www.SelflessAct.net> to ask for someone to donate to him. Alex says that his friend - the prospective donor - was not recruited through the web site. The American Society of Transplant Surgeons is "strongly opposed to the solicitation of organs or organ donors by recipients or their agents through Web sites," a fact of which Alex is aware. There are currently 60,918 people on the national waiting list for kidneys. The Transplant Center is now refusing to consider any living person as a donor for Alex. Do you agree with this decision?

Hospital or Hilton?: MSNBC reports more than a year after Sarah Nome was deemed healthy and given her discharge papers, the 82-year-old woman stubbornly refuses to leave her hospital bed. Nome admits there is no reason she should be racking up unpaid medical bills — which have now topped \$1 million — but says she has nowhere else to go. Now exasperated hospital officials at Kaiser Permanente's San Rafael Medical Center in California have persuaded a judge to approve her eviction. However, because Nome is bedridden and cannot walk, they have no intention of wheeling her onto the street. Instead, they hope the ruling encourages her to pack her bags.

Medical Bankruptcy: A new Harvard study published in the Feb. 2 issue of *Health Affairs* says illness and medical bills contributed to roughly half the personal bankruptcy filings in 2001, affecting between 1.9 – 2.2 million Americans. More than 75 percent of the filers had insurance, but many of them lost coverage during their illness, the research showed. People who succumb to medical debt are mostly middle-class or working-class people who own their own homes and have at least some college education, the study found.

Hollywood Banning Cosmetic Surgery?: City officials in West Hollywood, California, are trying to ban cosmetic surgery — for pets. The city's mayor plans to introduce a motion that would prohibit such practices as cropping a dog's ears or docking his tail. Also banned would be procedures such as de-barking, de-fanging, and other surgery performed on animals for 'non-curative' reasons. Many European countries already have this type of ban in effect, but Mayor John Duran says it would be a first for the United States.

Intersex: It's the first question new parents hear: girl or boy? But roughly one in 4,000 babies is born with both male and female traits. Prompt surgery to assign a gender was once the norm. However, at a presentation at the American Association for the Advancement of Science researchers said gender depends on more than anatomy or hormones, it also seems to stem from the very earliest brain development. Dr. William Reiner of the Oklahoma University Health Science Center urged doctors to hold off on the knife until children can determine their own sex.

The Nose Knows: Dr. Davangere Devanand, a professor of psychiatry and neurology at New York's Columbia University, reported at a meeting of the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology that persons who scored poorly on a test to identify 10 specific odors went on to develop Alzheimer's. These smells included strawberry, smoke, soap, menthol, clove, pineapple, natural gas, lilac, lemon and leather.

Don't Sit Still: A detailed study of mundane bodily movements found that obese people tend to be much less fidgety than lean people and spend at least two hours more each day just sitting still. The extra motion by lean people is enough to burn about 350 extra calories a day, which could add up to 10 to 30 pounds a year, said James A. Levine of the Mayo Clinic, who led the research published in the journal *Science*.

To Your Health! Studies in the Jan. 20 issue of *The New England Journal of Medicine* and the Feb. 1 issue of *The American Journal of Epidemiology* reported that wine, beer, and even hard liquor appear to protect against mental decline in older women. Women who had one drink a day (half an ounce) scored higher in various tests of memory than those who did not drink at all. The reason for this beneficial effect is not entirely clear, but it is probably connected to the significantly lower rates of cardiovascular disease among moderate drinkers, a phenomenon that has been known for some time.

Dialing for a Diagnosis: Doctors in Switzerland say cell phone photos of leg ulcers usually provide enough information to assess and treat most patients, saving those patients the trouble and cost of transport to the clinic. "We were able to show for the first time that telemedicine for chronic wounds is feasible under routine conditions using this new generation of mobile telephones and direct transfer via e-mail," the researchers report in the February issue of *Archives of Dermatology*.

These news stories have been pulled from recent public media headlines found in MSNBC News, BBC News, CNN, The Associated Press, ABC News, New York Times, Forbes, National Geographic, and Reuters.

You Be The Judge! Please consider the case study on the front page and mark your response below. All answers will be tallied and the results posted in a future *Ethics Noon News*. One lucky winner will be drawn at random each week and will win a \$25 gift certificate to the restaurant of their choice so be sure to include your name and contact information. Place your contest entry in the box marked 'Ethics Noon News' in the cafeteria.

Yes

No

Name: _____

Phone or Department: _____