



MARCH is ETHICS AWARENESS MONTH!

All of the following news stories are taken from recent headlines and 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 the B145 area, the Center's staff are available for ethics consultations Monday – Saturday and are on-call after hours for emergencies.

Pepsi and Pot?: Vending machines distributing marijuana are to begin operating in California. Proponents say marijuana is a valuable tool for relieving pain and stimulating appetite in the sick and vending allows patients to buy extra supplies whenever needed. The machines can only be used by people who have been prescribed the drug for health reasons. Patients will have to provide a prescription, and be fingerprinted and photographed before being allowed to use the facilities. The operators think that vending machines issuing prescription drugs could become a common sight in the US.

Heavy Consequences: Nutrition experts are burning up calories in expressing their outrage over proposed legislation in Mississippi that would prohibit restaurants from serving obese customers. They say the proposed bill, still in committee, is "ridiculous," "insane" and a wrong-headed approach to solving the national obesity epidemic. State Rep. John Read, one of the bill's three authors, said "I was trying to shed a little light on the No. 1 problem in Mississippi." The state has the highest obesity rate in the USA.

Lesson Learned: After decades of inattention to the possible psychiatric side effects of experimental medicines, the Food and Drug Administration is now requiring drug makers to study closely whether patients become suicidal during clinical trials. The new rules represent one of the most profound changes of the past 16 years to regulations governing drug development. The seeds for the new federal effort were planted four years ago with the discovery that antidepressants may cause some children and teenagers to become suicidal.

Clean Sweep: SMDC Health System scoured its four hospitals and 17 clinics across Minnesota and Wisconsin to purge promotional trinkets such as pens, notepads, clipboards, clocks, and other items decorated with logos for such drugs as Nexium, Vytorin and Lipitor. SMDC says trinkets, free samples, free food and drinks, free trips and other gifts have pervaded the medical profession, but SMDC's comprehensive conflict-of-interest policy, among other things, limits access to its clinics by drug company representatives. Employees suggested the "Clean Sweep" trinket roundup. SMDC intends to ship the 18,718 items to the west African nation of Cameroon.

Kidney for Sale: An organ-trafficking network was uncovered in India in January. Poor Indians lured by the prospect of extra money ensure the traffickers a continuous supply of fresh kidneys. According to a government estimate, more than 100,000 kidney transplants are needed in India every year, but only 5,000 are performed legally. "This was a racket run by a man who has been on the run for about 15 years," said the joint commissioner of police. "He used to charge about \$37,500 from rich patients around the world and pay about \$1,270 to the laborer."

Traumatic: Research in January's *Journal of the American College of Surgeons* shows that many patients with minimal injuries are being transferred from community hospitals to Level I and II trauma centers. Although trauma systems substantially reduce injury-related deaths, researchers found that patients are increasingly being transferred to trauma centers for non-medical reasons, such as gender, age, race, and time of day. This trend could be a result of recent changes in the Emergency Medical and Active Labor Treatment Act (EMTALA) that no longer require community hospitals to provide emergency specialty coverage.

Going for Guinness Gold: In preparation for Rio's five-day Carnival blowout in February, Brazilian model Angela Bismarchi is having her 42nd plastic surgery - closing in on the Guinness World Record of 47 surgical procedures held by 52-year-old American Cindy Jackson, who calls herself a "Living Doll." "I always was vain," Bismarchi, 36, said at the medical clinic near Rio where her plastic surgeon husband has operated on her 10 times. Bismarchi will have nylon wires implanted in her eyes to give them an Asian slant, in line with this year's Carnival theme.

Clean Your Nails: Doctors and nurses on the go often skip soap and water in favor of an alcohol-based hand gel designed to curb the spread of infection. It turns out that's not enough. In a Nebraska study, medical workers nearly doubled their use of the alcohol-based gel, but their generally cleaner hands had no bearing on the rate of infections among patients. The doctor who studied the problem pointed to many villains: Rings and fingernails that are too long and hard to clean, poor handling of catheters and treatment areas that aren't sanitized.

They Come in Twos: A woman who said her breast implants were damaged in an on-the-job car accident should be compensated for the replacement of only one implant according to the North Carolina Court of Appeals who issued the decision in a workers' compensation claim. The claimant said the 2001 accident caused rippling and a decrease in size of her implants. The case was a first for the court, which had never considered whether damaged breast implants were covered by workers compensation.

Rates Climbing: In December, the CDC reported the suicide rate among middle-aged Americans has reached its highest point in at least 25 years. The rate rose by about 20 percent between 1999 and 2004 for U.S. residents ages 45 through 54 - far outpacing increases among younger adults. The female suicide rates are highest in middle age. The rate for males - who account for the majority of suicides - peak after retirement, said Dr. Alex Crosby, a CDC epidemiologist.

Dental Tourists: Shrugging off concerns about hygiene and Mexico's brutal drug war, thousands of Americans are heading to Mexican border cities for cheap dental treatment. A dental crown in the United States costs upward of \$600 per tooth, compared to \$190 or less in Mexico. Aspiring Mexican dentists are moving to border cities in droves and are luring American patients away from farther flung discount destinations such as Hungary and Thailand. Americans have long crossed the border for cheap medicines, eye surgery or specialist doctors, but dentists are now in highest demand.

Making Babies: Scientists believe they have made a potential breakthrough in the treatment of serious disease by creating a human embryo with three separate parents. The embryos have been created using DNA from a man and two women in lab tests. The Newcastle University team believes the technique could help to eradicate a whole class of hereditary diseases, including some forms of epilepsy. It could ensure women with genetic defects do not pass the diseases on to their children.

Interrogation or Torture?: Senate officials demanded a criminal investigation into waterboarding by government interrogators in February after the Bush administration acknowledged for the first time that the tactic was used on three terror suspects. Waterboarding involves strapping a suspect down and pouring water over his cloth-covered face to create the sensation of drowning. It has been traced back hundreds of years, to the Spanish Inquisition, and is condemned by nations around the world. "We used it against these three detainees because of the circumstances at the time," the CIA director said.

Bummer, Dude: Employers can fire workers who use medical marijuana even if it was legally recommended by a doctor, the California Supreme Court ruled in January, dealing the state another setback in its standoff with federal law enforcement. The man who was fired held a medical marijuana card authorizing him to use the drug to treat a back injury sustained while serving in the Air Force. The company argued the firing was legal because all marijuana use is illegal under federal law, which does not recognize the medical marijuana laws in California and 11 other states.

Glow Kitty: South Korean scientists have cloned cats that glow red when exposed to ultraviolet rays. Three Turkish Angora cats were born in January and February through cloning with a gene that produces a red fluorescent protein that makes them glow in dark. One died at birth, but the two others survived. The development means other genes can also be inserted in the course of cloning, paving the way for producing lab cats with genetic diseases, including those of humans, to help develop new treatments, the Science and Technology Ministry said.

Doggie Duty: Stressed troops in Iraq received a first-of-its-kind holiday gift last year: two highly sensitive black Labrador retrievers that military officials hope will help soldiers navigate the ragged emotions of life in a war zone. The specially selected and trained therapy dogs, Boe and Budge, will be attached to combat stress units in Tikrit and Mosul, where "they'll be a vital part of the medical team" that helps troops struggling with stress, sleep disorders and event-related trauma. Therapy dogs offer affection without regard to "gender, race, disability or injury," says the chief training officer for America's VetDogs.

Get the Lead Out: Health departments around the country say traditional medicines used by many immigrants from Latin America, India and other parts of Asia are the second most common source of lead poisoning in the U.S. and may account for up to 30 percent of all childhood lead poisoning cases. The dangerous medicines are manufactured outside the U.S. and are sold by folk healers, ethnic grocery stores, and neighborhood shops. Lead is added to many of the concoctions because of its supposed curative properties, even though doctors say it has no proven medical benefits.

Not a Security Risk: In January, a federal court reaffirmed the state of Missouri must provide transportation to abortion clinics for inmates who want to undergo the procedure. The state had appealed a 2005 U.S. Supreme Court ruling stating the state had to allow an inmate to have an abortion after the state tried to end the practice of driving prisoners to clinics for elective abortions. "The court recognized that the right to elect to have an abortion survives incarceration."