



## MARCH is ETHICS AWARENESS MONTH!

**All of the following news stories 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 222 Medical Arts Building, the Center's staff are available for ethics consultations M-F 8:30am – 5:00pm and are on-call after hours for emergencies.

**Governator:** Perhaps someone should have warned Arnold Schwarzenegger that nurses are no pushovers. For weeks, California's Governor has been locked in a feud with the state's R.N.s over his decision to suspend new state rules that would limit the number of patients a nurse must care for. "We don't have enough nurses--nor can the hospitals afford that," the Governor said. "Our hospitals are already closing down." The R.N.s have protested at public events unfurling banners such as HANDS OFF OUR RATIOS and DON'T BE BIG BUSINESS'S BULLY!

**Hands Down:** Dr. Peter Hurd has told *Biological Psychology* that men with short index fingers scored higher on measures of physical aggression than those with longer index fingers. Other studies have suggested, in men, a long ring finger and symmetrical hands are indications of fertility, and that women are more likely to be fertile if they have a longer index finger. Studies have shown a direct correlation between finger lengths and the amount of male sex hormone testosterone that a baby is exposed to in the womb, however researchers warn against job screening based on finger length.

**The New House Call:** Doctors may no longer make house calls, but they are answering patient e-mail messages - and being paid for it. The *NY Times* reports health plans and medical groups around the country are beginning to pay doctors to reply by e-mail. Reimbursement rates vary from a full office visit charge to a \$5 - \$10 co-payment that is billed to the patient's credit card. Surveys show that e-mail reduces the number of office visits giving physicians more time to spend with patients who need to be seen face to face.

**Funny-looking Mouse:** New research suggests within a decade silicon breast implants could be replaced by tissue grown from a person's own stem cells. Jeremy Mao of the University of Illinois took human stem cells and used them to grow fat tissue using a biologically compatible scaffolding. He then successfully implanted the tissue into mice with an immune deficiency to prevent them from rejecting the implants. The implants had maintained their size and shape after four weeks. Mao presented his work at the American Assc. for the Advancement of Science conference in February.

**No More Studs:** A proposed law in Washington would make it a misdemeanor to pierce minors unless their parents give permission and are present when the piercing occurs. The latter, State Sen. Pam Roach said, almost guarantees that teens won't be getting pierced in inappropriate places. "Moms just don't want to see that," Roach said. The bill doesn't apply to ears.

**Feel the Burn:** Supplies of Prilosec OTC, a popular heartburn drug sold over the counter, have fallen far short of demand. Many Wall Street analysts and consumer advocates say they believe that Proctor and Gamble could easily meet demand for the drug if it chose. They note the shortage of Prilosec has been very good for Proctor and Gamble's partner AstraZeneca because it has increased sales of AstraZeneca's Nexium. Many doctors view the two drugs as essentially identical, yet the cost of prescription Nexium is about \$4 a pill compared to 70 cents a pill for Prilosec OTC.

**Caffeine a Psychological Disorder?** A study by Roland Griffiths, a professor of behavioral biology and neuroscience at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, argues caffeine withdrawal should be included as a psychological disorder in the next edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*. The DSM is published by the American Psychiatric Association and covers all mental health disorders for both children and adults.

**CASE STUDY (see reverse for enter and win details):** According to prosecutors, five-week old Destiny Ashe had been shaken and hit so badly her brain swelled and hemorrhaged causing her death. In February, her 34 year-old mother Carissa Ashe pleaded guilty to a charge of voluntary manslaughter. District Attorney Paul Howard says Ashe has had two more children since the death of her baby daughter in 1998 and her seven children -- ranging in age from one to 16 -- are with relatives or in foster care. Ashe, who has no prior criminal history or complaints of abuse, could have been sentenced to 20 years in prison. Instead, Superior Court Judge Rowland Barnes ordered Ashe to serve five years on probation and to have the tubal ligation within 90 days to prevent her from having more children. Prosecutors believe that is the first criminal case in Georgia in which a woman has agreed to sterilization to avoid prison. Medicaid is covering the cost of the operation. Critics of the plea bargain argue it is too lenient and unethical. Do you think courts should be able to order sterilization (permanently take away the ability to reproduce) as part of a criminal sentence?

**Diana's Influence?** A study published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry Research* suggests rates of the eating disorder bulimia appear to have been influenced by revelations Princess Diana had battled with the condition. The research found rates rose in the early 1990s - when news of Diana's illness appeared. However, her death in 1997 coincided with the beginning of the decline in the rate of bulimia seen by general practitioners. Eating disorder experts said bulimia rates had not fallen - instead fewer people were talking about it.

**Happy Days:** A study in February's edition of the journal *Pediatrics* found cancer doesn't doom youngsters to a miserable childhood. Researchers interviewed 8 to 12 year-olds and reported that after treatment, many children are just as happy and well-adjusted as those who never had the illness — sometimes even more. The results also indicate that children's perceptions often differ from those of their parents, whose own negative feelings about the experience may shade how they think their children are coping.

**Barrier to Stem Cell Research:** A Cook County, Illinois judge has ruled a couple whose frozen embryo was accidentally destroyed at a fertility clinic has the right to file a wrongful-death lawsuit. The ruling states "a pre-embryo is a 'human being' ... whether or not it is implanted in its mother's womb." The judge said the couple is as entitled to seek compensation as any parents whose child has been killed. The ruling relied on Illinois' Wrongful Death Act, which allows lawsuits to be filed if unborn fetuses are killed in an accident or assault.

**Tattooed Message:** For an 80th birthday present an emergency medicine specialist tattooed DO NOT RESUSCITATE across his chest. The physician says he has performed enough resuscitations to know what his wishes would be if the tables were turned. "In most cases, when you have any cardiac or respiratory arrest, you're unconscious and so you can't convey your wishes to anyone," he said. Despite the gravity of his tattoo message, the octogenarian hasn't lost his sense of humour. "It'd be my luck that they wouldn't open my shirt ... before commencing CPR," he quipped.

**Side-effect of the Side-effect:** Viagra may aid in the treatment of enlarged hearts that can result from high blood pressure says a report in the Jan.23 online edition of *Nature Medicine*. The drug, known generically as sildenafil citrate was originally discovered by researchers studying blood pressure and heart disease. Dr. William B. White, head of the hypertension section of the University of Connecticut Health Center, noted the drug is effective only for a short time and would need to be longer acting to be useful in treating heart enlargement.

**Seal of Approval:** All eight varieties of a liquid decongestant for children now bear the Orthodox Union's trademark label - the initial U inside an O - making Triaminic the first over-the-counter medicine to be certified as kosher. The kosher certification is also expected to appeal to vegetarians, people who are lactose intolerant, and Muslims whose own dietary restrictions are similar to those of Observant Jews who shun foods and beverages with the slightest trace of animal derivatives. With consumers scrutinizing ingredients more carefully than ever, many people seek out a kosher label as an additional assurance of quality control.

**Meth Labs Affect You:** 20 states and both houses of Congress are considering legislation that would impose tight restrictions on common cold medicines that contain pseudoephedrine, an essential ingredient in making methamphetamine. Although the bills vary in detail, most would classify pseudoephedrine as a controlled substance and would allow sales of products containing it, like Sudafed, only in pharmacies, not in grocery or convenience stores. Customers would have to purchase the medicine from a pharmacist, show photo identification, and sign a logbook so that sales can be tracked by computer.

**HIV Development:** Health officials in New York say they have found a new strain of highly drug-resistant HIV in a man in his mid-40s. The strain - known as 3-DCR HIV - has not been detected anywhere else in the world and is "difficult or impossible to treat", according to health experts. The man is thought to have been infected quite recently, and developed AIDS between two and 20 months after infection. Progression to AIDS usually takes about 10 years.

*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: \_\_\_\_\_