



## MARCH is ETHICS AWARENESS MONTH!

**All of the following are recent news headlines that 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 and are on-call after hours for emergencies. Please enjoy Week 2 and remember to visit the Advance Directive display in the Capital (E) Lobby March 24-31 to enter to win a basket filled with Ethical gifts.

**Drunks on Horses:** South Dakota lawmakers decided in January that it's better to have drunks on horses and bicycles than behind the wheel of an auto or truck. The state Senate Judiciary Committee approved a bill 6-1 that will exempt horses and bikes from drunken driving laws, meaning intoxicated people who either pedal or saddle up to get home after a night at the bar cannot be arrested for drunken driving. If the person runs into something, he or she can still be charged with disorderly conduct.

**Get the Lead Out:** According to the EPA, the U.S. produces more than two million tons of e-waste (cell phones, computers, TVs, etc) a year and 90% of it ends up in landfills, leaching toxins into groundwater or emitting carcinogens. Europe has passed new legislation forcing companies to eliminate nearly all of the hazardous substances found in new electronics manufactured or sold in the European Union. The directive may also benefit the rest of the world, since manufacturers probably won't produce a "clean" version for Europe and a "dirty" version for everyone else.

**Baby On Board:** A Phoenix judge has ruled fetuses do not count as passengers when it comes to determining who may drive in the carpool lane. Candace Dickinson was fined \$367 for improper use of a carpool lane, but contended the fetus inside her womb allowed her to use the lane. Motorists who use the lanes normally must carry at least one passenger during weekday rush hours. The judge said Dickinson's theory "would require officers to carry guns, radios and pregnancy testers, and I don't think we want to go there."

**Bun in the Oven Timer:** Women may now be able to determine how many eggs they have left in their ovaries, allowing them to make more informed decisions about whether to try for a baby sooner rather than later. Although a woman is born with all the eggs she will produce during her lifetime, the number decreases with age. A new over-the-counter kit marketed by Biofusion measures hormone levels in the blood and compares them with expected age-adjusted levels to determine the number of eggs left. The test costs about \$320.

**Chocolate Stand:** The widow of the man who ignited the low-carb craze is donating \$16,000 so some Florida school children can take a trip without having to sell candy. The Fort Lauderdale students refused to take part in a school fund-raiser, saying that selling chocolate bars and potato chips goes against what they were taught about healthy eating. Veronica Atkins told the South Florida Sun-Sentinel that she's proud of the children and wants to make sure they are able to go on their trip to Washington DC.

**Not in My Backyard:** Boston University has won final federal approval for a controversial plan to build a research laboratory in the city's South End that would handle some of the world's most dangerous and exotic germs. The decision by the National Institutes of Health secures \$128 million in federal funding for the lab, which will be part of a national group of facilities that will study infectious diseases such as ebola and the West Nile virus. However, opponents have criticized the decision to build the lab in a densely populated urban neighborhood.

**Fair and Square:** Speaking up for yourself could be good for your health. In a recent study, people who felt they received fair treatment at work were much less likely to suffer from coronary heart disease in later years compared to people who felt they never got a fair shake. Perceiving injustice may translate into feelings of anger, hostility, and depression, all negative states that can affect heart health. For those not able to change work situations, voicing concerns to a sympathetic person may be enough to help relieve some of the stress.

**Where No Stone Has Gone Before:** William Shatner sold his kidney stone on Ebay for \$25,000. Enough said.

### CASE STUDY (discussion on reverse)

In an open letter published in the medical journal *The Lancet*, 263 doctors from 7 countries urged the U.S. government to abandon force-feeding and the use of restraints on hunger strikers at Guantanamo Bay prison camp. In the *Lancet* letter, doctors from Britain, the United States, Ireland, Germany, Australia, Italy and the Netherlands said the World Medical Association specifically prohibits force-feeding in declarations to which the AMA is a signatory. "This is a challenge to the American Medical Association," the lead author said. "Are they going to obey those declarations (forbidding force-feeding), or are those bits of paper literally not worth the paper they are written on?"

**Innerspace:** Scientists are developing a new generation of dextrous mini-robots for use in minimally invasive surgery. *New Scientist* magazine reports that several prototypes of the radio-controlled robots are being tested in animal models. They have been used to help perform gall bladder and prostate removal in pig experiments. The University of Nebraska team believes they could potentially revolutionize minimally invasive keyhole surgery.

**No(se) Dose:** To stay alert behind the wheel on long road trips, skip the coffee and try sniffing peppermint or cinnamon. Researchers from West Virginia have found that getting a whiff of pleasant odors periodically while driving increases alertness, reduces fatigue, and even lowers drivers' anxiety and frustration. The study also suggested that by stimulating the nervous system, peppermint and cinnamon odors can enhance motivation and performance among athletes and clerical office workers.

**As the Bird Flies:** The entrepreneur behind Virgin Atlantic Airways told business leaders at the World Economic Forum a human bird flu pandemic could ground most aircraft. "If it happens, an airline is going to have 50 percent of its planes grounded, maybe more — 60, 70 percent," he said. The only positive would be a fall in fuel costs: "It will certainly bring down oil prices with a thump." Air travel is expected to be in the frontline should the H5N1 strain of bird flu become easily transmitted between people.

**Stand and Deliver:** Eighty-one-year-old Myron Manders wants the Social Security Administration to know that he still is alive, but it isn't listening. Last November, Manders was preparing to leave a hospital where he was treated for pneumonia when a social worker said his insurance company would not pay the bill because it believed Manders died on Sept. 1. Mr. Manders sought to clear up the problem by showing up at a Social Security office but the in-person appearance did not help. Myron Manders would not say exactly what was going through his mind. "Curse words," he hinted.

**Seeing is Believing:** 26 years ago Joyce Urch of Coventry, England was blinded by a hereditary illness. Recently, after suffering a heart attack and kidney failure, doctors at the local hospital described her body as lifeless. An operation saved her life — but her doctors have no idea why it restored her sight. "It's obviously unexpected," said Martin Been, Joyce's cardiologist. "It's a fantastic side effect of what happened — a rather dramatic way for it to happen but it's wonderful. I wish I knew why."

**Weather Forecast:** According to a warning from the Japan Meteorological Agency, the world's average temperature rose in 2005 to its second highest level in more than 100 years. Japan is the home of the Kyoto Protocol, the landmark treaty requiring rich countries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. President Bush rejected the Kyoto Protocol as one of his first acts after taking office in 2001, arguing it was unfair because it imposed no burden on developing economies. His administration has also questioned the science on global warming, though many scientists point to the increase in catastrophic hurricanes as further proof of global climate change.

**Hard Hit:** In bad economic times, more people in New York City get hit by subway trains. Researchers from NYU Medical Center reviewed the cases of 208 patients who were treated after being struck by subways. The study reveals the unemployed and mentally ill are the most likely to be struck, and the number of incidents depends on how well the city is doing economically. Perhaps surprisingly, most of the patients suffered relatively minor injuries, such as bruises and scratches or the loss of a finger or toe.

**Health Tourists:** Foreigners are destabilizing India's health system, say doctors writing in *BMJ*. They say increasing numbers of patients are coming to India from the Middle East, Africa, Pakistan and Bangladesh for complex operations or transplants which are not performed in their own countries. Patients are also coming from the US, Europe and the UK for "quick, efficient and cheap" heart bypasses or orthopedic operations. But at the same time, the country has one of the lowest levels of public spending on healthcare in the world - less than 1% of gross domestic product.

#### **CASE STUDY DISCUSSION:**

There are now 490 detainees in Guantanamo, and only 10 of the terrorism suspects held at the naval base have been formally charged with a crime. Some have been held for nearly four years without charge. The United Nations called for the center's closure in a February 16 report, which concluded that tactics such as force-feeding and prolonged solitary confinement may amount to torture. A core principle of medical ethics in the United States is the principal that every person has the right to determine what does, and does not happen to his or her own body. The doctors signed the letter condemning the force-feeding, which reports say involves strapping detainees to a chair, forcing a long tube into the stomach through the nose, and feeding them large quantities of liquid nutrients and water. The procedure is not done by physicians, but by soldiers and without sedation. "Prisoners have a right to refuse treatment," said the article's lead author, "Physicians do not have to agree with the political views of the prisoners but they must respect their informed decision."

Guantanamo officials have denied the practices constitute torture, saying they're necessary to ensure detainee health. Although the World Medical Association specifically prohibits force-feeding in the Declarations of Tokyo and Malta, and the American Medical Association has signed these declarations, the Pentagon insists "Professional organization declarations by doctors, lawyers, dentists, etc. are not international treaties, therefore are nonbinding and not applicable to sovereign nation-states."

**What do you think?**