



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.

Don't Speak: A Catholic School in Rhode Island instituted new lunch rules that require students to remain silent during lunch. The move comes after three recent choking incidents in the cafeteria. The school principal sent a letter to parents: "If the lunch room is loud we cannot hear if a child is choking." The letter also listed the new lunchtime rules, including "All students must remain silent," "No child out of their seat," and "One trip to the trash can." Any child who breaks the rules will be put in lunch detention the following day.

Starbucks For Two: Women who consume moderate amounts of caffeine during pregnancy do not have a greater risk of premature births or underweight babies, new research published in the *British Medical Journal* shows. The study joins a host of other studies that have yielded results both pro and con on the issue but, according to the authors, this trial is more definitive. Dr. Jennifer Wu, an OB/GYN cautions "I still think you probably want to decrease consumption of stimulants during pregnancy and have as healthy a lifestyle as possible."

How Was It? Doctors shouldn't shy away from asking patients about their sex lives, a new research paper in *The Lancet* advises. Researchers say problems in the bedroom can translate into serious medical conditions, and ignoring sexual dysfunction may mean missing early indicators for heart failure, depression, hormone conditions, kidney failure or other ailments. What patients often fail to realize, physicians say, is that sexual dysfunctions are often a symptom of something more serious and patients fail to report that information when early preventive measures could be taken.

Rent-A-Womb: Surrogate motherhood is among the latest in a long list of roles being outsourced to India. "In the U.S. a childless couple would have to spend anything up to \$50,000. In India, it's done for \$10,000-\$12,000." Fertility clinics usually charge \$2,000-\$3,000 for the procedure while a surrogate is paid between \$3,000 and \$6,000, a fortune in a country with an annual per capita income of around \$500. But the practice is not without its critics in India with some calling it the "commodification of motherhood" and an exploitation of the poor by the rich.

Can't Burst His Bubble: Grayson Rosenberger, 15, is the grand prize winner in the inaugural Bubble Wrap Competition. He used Bubble Wrap brand packing material to develop a cost-effective cosmetic skin covering for prosthetic limbs. Rosenberger was able to turn a basic artificial leg into a more realistic one using a heat gun to mold Bubble Wrap cushioning around the steel rod of a prosthetic limb to give it muscle-like tone and shape. He said his invention should benefit amputees in Africa who are viewed strangely because they have to "walk around with an open metal rod" as a leg.

Your Water on Drugs: New federal prescription drug disposal guidelines recommend mixing unused, unneeded or expired drugs with undesirable substances — like cat litter or coffee grounds — and tossing them in the trash in nondescript containers. Doing so should curb prescription drug abuse and protect lakes and streams from contamination, government officials say. While flushing drugs down the toilet can stem that sort of abuse, it also can create environmental problems. Recent Geological studies have shown that a wide range of pharmaceuticals and other compounds survive wastewater treatment and later are discharged into lakes, streams and other bodies of water.

Hormones Gone Wild: Lavender and tea tree essential oils found in some shampoos, soaps and lotions can temporarily leave boys with enlarged breasts in rare cases, apparently by disrupting their hormonal balance, a preliminary study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* suggests. While advising parents to consider the possible risk, several hormone experts emphasized that the problem appears to happen infrequently and clears up when the oils are no longer used. It's unclear how often this problem might crop up in other young children.

What Works: The low-carb, high-fat Atkins diet gets high marks in one of the biggest, longest, head-to-head studies of popular weight-loss plans, beating the Zone, the Ornish diet and even U.S. guidelines. Stanford University researcher Christopher Gardner, the lead author, said the study shows that Atkins may be more healthful than critics contend. Critics argue the study isn't a fair comparison because by the end, few women were following any of the diets very strictly although those in the Atkins group came the closest.

Virtual Iraq: Skip Rizzo, a psychologist at USC, has helped create a program that simulates life in the war zone for Iraq veterans suffering from conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder. The ground-breaking treatment allows soldiers to experience the sights, sounds and even the smells of a war-zone, courtesy of wrap-around goggles linked to a startlingly realistic virtual world. The idea is to re-introduce veterans to the experiences that have inflicted mental scars until gradually they are no longer haunted by the memories, a long-established therapeutic technique known as "exposure therapy."

Vaccine Rumors: Health officials in Pakistan say they have failed to immunize over 160,000 children against polio due to rumors the vaccine causes sexual impotence. Parents in parts of northern Pakistan told the BBC news website they feared an "American conspiracy" to cut the fertility of the next generation. Pakistan is one of four countries the World Health Organization (WHO) says is a source of polio. The WHO has led a \$196m-a-year campaign to control the disease in Pakistan.

Lost in Suburbia: Police called to a house over a burst water pipe discovered the mummified remains of the resident, dead for more than a year, sitting in front of a blaring television set. The 70-year-old appeared to have died of natural causes. Officials could not explain why the electricity had not been turned off, considering Ricardo had not been heard from since December 2005. Neighbors said when they had not seen Ricardo, who was diabetic and had been blind for years, they assumed he was in the hospital or a long-term care facility.

Not Hershey's: Three people in Britain have each been given a nine-month suspended jail term for supplying cannabis-laced chocolate bars to multiple sclerosis (MS) sufferers. In their testimonies, they insisted they offered a free service funded by voluntary donations, which was only available to MS sufferers who provided a medical note confirming their condition. The trio admitted making thousands of "Canna-Biz" bars and sending them to MS sufferers around the world. One of the persons, herself a MS sufferer said "How can it be wrong to try and help ill people?"

Up In Flames: Microwaving sponges can sterilize them but can also apparently have a downside: Some sponges may burst into flames. The *Washington Post* reported in January that new research showed microwaving a kitchen sponge for two minutes can kill most germs. Since then, several unhappy readers called to report that when they tried this at home their sponges ignited. In response, the researcher defended his research but cautioned to fully soak the sponges with water and to beware of hot sponges after exposure.

Hold Your Breath: Traffic pollution can prevent the lungs of children who live near busy roads from developing properly, making them more likely to suffer respiratory and heart problems later in life, according to a study in *The Lancet*. The study of 3600 children found that children who had lived within 500 yards (500 meters) of a highway from the age of 10, had significantly less lung function by the time they reached 18 than youngsters exposed to less traffic pollution.

Simple Salvation: A professor who developed an inexpensive, easy-to-make system for filtering arsenic from well water has won a \$1 million engineering prize. Abul Hussam spent years testing hundreds of prototype filtration systems. His final innovation is a simple, maintenance-free system that uses sand, charcoal, bits of brick and shards of a type of cast iron. Each filter has 20 pounds of porous iron, which forms a chemical bond with arsenic. The filter removes almost every trace of arsenic from well water. The filtration systems cost about \$40 each, and more than 30,000 have already been distributed.

Window To The Soul: It may be possible to read a person's personality through their eyes, Swedish researchers have said. They have detected iris patterns which show warm-heartedness and trust or neuroticism and impulsiveness. Dr George Fieldman, from Chilterns University College, said: "This is very interesting. It shows that some aspects of personality have a genetic base and to identify them in the eye in this fascinating way is significant." He said it opened up the possibility that security services could one day use the technique to analyze people.

Feeling The Pain: Prices for the most popular drugs used by senior citizens rose about 6.2 percent, nearly twice the 3.2 percent rate of inflation for 2006, according to AARP. AARP used the report to support an effort to give the federal Medicare agency the authority to negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies. The drug industry's trade group, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, or PhRMA, called the report flawed and said giving Medicare bargaining power would limit the number of drugs the agency paid for.

Always meant to complete your own Advance Directive? Now is the time! This year the Clinical Ethics Center and the Human Values and Ethics Committee are encouraging you to stop by the Garden Lobby on Thursday, March 29 from 7a.m. – 7 p.m. where assistance will be available to help you complete your Advance Directives. Every person who completes a directive, or brings evidence of an already completed directive, will be entered into a drawing to win a fantastic gift basket filled with environmentally and socially responsible products to try for yourself including coffee, candles, household products, lightbulbs and more.