



## MARCH is ETHICS AWARENESS MONTH!

**All of the following news stories have interesting ethical aspects. Please enjoy Week 3.**

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.

**Big Brother?:** The FDA has cleared the way for a company to market implantable chips that would provide easy access to individual medical records. Applied Digital Solutions Co chairman Scott R Silverman says its so-called VeriChips could save lives and limit injuries from errors in medical treatment. They could also serve as under-the-skin ID chips for security and access-control devices. The move has fueled fears among privacy advocates of widespread tracking of people with implanted radio frequency tags, even though that ability does not yet exist.

**The Hassle Factor:** A nationwide survey by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation found that 87 percent of doctors say the overall morale of the profession has gone down in the past few years, and nearly 60 percent said their own morale had declined. Most doctors cite reams of time-consuming paperwork that is out of proportion to time spent caring for patients, declining reimbursements from insurers, a loss of autonomy from managed care, and fear of malpractice lawsuits.

**Cigar Aficionados No More:** Cuba - the home of the fine cigar - has passed tough new regulations on tobacco smoking in public places. It is now banned in most work places, cigarette machines are being removed, and it will be illegal to sell tobacco products close to schools. Almost half of all Cuban adults smoke, and tobacco and cigar exports are vital to the country's economy. The inspiration for the ban is said to have come from President Fidel Castro, who has given up smoking cigars.

**Not For the Queasy:** HealthDay reports that since federal officials approved the use of "medical maggots" last year, orders for the critters have skyrocketed as doctors use them as alternative treatments for patients with stubborn, slow-healing leg and foot wounds. Maggots clean wounds by eating dead and infected tissue. In addition, they disinfect the wounds and stimulate the growth of healthy tissue. Dr. Barry Handler, a plastic surgeon who has used them on several patients in the San Diego area, says he has seen great successes but admits that many patients – not to mention nurses – don't want to go near the little larvae.

**Broken Heart:** It's clear now that a broken heart is real, at least that's what researchers reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. It appears that emotional stress, such as the death of someone close, or other major emotional events can cause symptoms of what appears to be a major heart attack. However, unlike a real heart attack, the patient usually recovers within days, with reversible and no long term damage to their heart. The researchers dubbed the condition "Broken Heart Syndrome" and it appears that women are more vulnerable to the phenomenon.

**No More Stigma:** In what would be a major shift in health policy, some experts are recommending that virtually all Americans be tested routinely for the AIDS virus, much as they are for cancer and other diseases. Two large federally financed studies appearing in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that the cost of routinely testing nearly all adults would be outweighed by a reduction in new infections and the opportunity to start patients on drug cocktails early, when they work best.

**CASE STUDY (see reverse for enter and win details):** A short summary of a case that has dominated headlines for the past 7 years: 41 year-old Terri Schiavo suffered a heart attack 15 years ago and was resuscitated, although her brain suffered enormous damage from the heart attack. Terri's brain has deteriorated because of the lack of oxygen and by mid 1996, the CAT scans of her brain showed a severely abnormal structure. Much of her cerebral cortex was gone and had been replaced by cerebral spinal fluid. Medicine cannot cure this condition. Doctors hired by Terri's husband say the deterioration of Terri's brain left her without thoughts or feelings, that the damage is irreversible, and that Terri's life-like appearance is merely the result of brain stem activity -- basically involuntary reflexes we all have. An independent doctor hired by the court reached the same conclusions. Doctors hired by Terri's parents did not dispute the physical damage done to Terri, but they claim eventually new therapies will be developed that could improve her condition. Terri's body continues to function without her cerebral cortex. She is sustained by a feeding tube surgically inserted into her stomach. She cannot eat through her mouth without a strong likelihood of choking to death. Terri's husband has repeatedly won the right in court to have the feeding tube removed. Terri's parents want him to walk away and let them care for their daughter. Estimates have placed Schiavo's care as high as \$500,000 a year since she collapsed 15 years ago. [Please consider the questions on the reverse side to win \$25 gift certificate.]

**Not Foreign Anymore:** The Indiana Supreme Court has ruled that having a tongue stud does not invalidate the results of a drunk driving breath test. State law says no foreign substance can be placed in a person's mouth during the 20 minutes before a breath test is administered because it might skew the results of the test. The court ruled objects such as a stainless steel stud in the tongue are not "foreign" if they are ordinarily found in the mouth.

**"Gift of Life" Tax Relief:** An Arkansas bill would allow living organ donors to deduct up to \$10,000 from their Arkansas taxes at least once in their lifetime. The bill would remove a financial disincentive for people who donate human organs. Currently many insurers and employers do not reimburse expenses incurred when donating one or more organs for transplantation. The tax deduction could only be taken by living taxpayers for expenses such as travel and lodging, lost wages and medical costs associated with an organ transplant.

**Caffeine Alternative:** Staying up all night to cram for an exam is nothing new, but now students are increasingly turning to a powerful and potentially addictive drug designed to treat attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder for a late-night boost. Consisting of a mix of amphetamines, Adderall is known to correct chemical imbalances in the brain. A 2002 study by the University of Wisconsin reported that one in five college students took the drug. In February, Canadian health officials suspended the sale of Adderall XR indefinitely because the drug was linked to 20 deaths.

**Pass the Soy:** A diet rich in fiber and vegetables appears to lower cholesterol just as much as taking a statin drug. Researchers writing in the February issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, said people who cannot tolerate the statin drugs because of side effects could turn to the easy-to-follow diet. David Jenkins and colleagues say they created a diet "portfolio" rich in soy milk, soy burgers, almonds, oats, barley, psyllium seeds, okra and eggplant that lowered low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or "bad" cholesterol, by nearly 30%.

**Failure Can Kill:** Supporters of the Bush administration's abstinence-only education program have led intense attacks on the nonprofit Consumers Union, publishers of *Consumers Report*, who recently used its standardized tests to test latex condoms. The group, who has issued similar reports since 1979, says its review was not politically motivated and defended the testing saying, "Condoms remain the only family planning and pregnancy prevention method that can help prevent sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, which causes AIDS." Amazingly, the air pressure test yields balloons three feet tall and one foot wide.

**A New Inequality:** A growing number of doctors and clinics are offering premium services to wealthy customers. About 250 so-called "concierge physicians" exist in the United States today: these are primary-care doctors who charge an annual retainer of \$3000 to \$25,000 in exchange for same-day appointments, unhurried exams and house calls. Members can get fast-track appointments with overbooked specialists, too. Critics argue the trend hurts everyone without high-end resources, but concierge docs say it frees them up to do their jobs right.

**First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage:** Married adults fare better on a number of health measures than people who are divorced, widowed, or never married, according to a report released in December by the National Center for Health Statistics. Spouses of both sexes were less likely to smoke, drink heavily, or be physically inactive than those in the other group. "There's plenty of evidence that both human sexuality and intimacy and love and marriage are very, very good for our health," said Dr. Stephen Bogdewic of Indiana University School of Medicine. "If a new drug had that same impact, virtually every doctor in the country would be recommending it."

**What About Snickers?** The deep-fried Mars bar, served with a side order of fries, threatens to usurp the haggis as Scotland's best-known dish. Worried public health experts began investigating stories about the chocolate-covered caramel and nougat candy bars being deep-fried at fast food outlets after the phenomenon was mentioned by Jay Leno on the Tonight Show. They had hoped to lay to rest an urban myth and instead found out it was real. The study, reported in the British medical journal *The Lancet*, adds to concerns over poor diet and physical health problems.

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**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.

1. Who do think should be responsible for making decisions about Terri's care?
  - a. Her husband
  - b. Her parents
2. If Terri's parents win their case to keep artificially feeding Terri, who should be responsible for paying the estimated \$500,000/year for her care?
  - a. Her husband
  - b. Her parents
  - c. Taxpayers
3. Do you think Terri's life should be preserved at all costs?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone or Department: \_\_\_\_\_