



MARCH is ETHICS AWARENESS MONTH!

All of the following news stories have interesting ethical aspects. Please enjoy Week 4.

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.

Not The Cookies!: The annual sale of cookies has Girl Scout leaders facing critics who think selling \$400 million worth of cookies might not be the smartest move in a country where childhood obesity is considered an epidemic. If that wasn't enough, the scouts are fending off concerns that the cookies have high levels of unhealthy trans fats. The national office has even had to deny that child labor was used to produce the chocolate that covers the popular Thin Mints. The National Office states the sale helps troops raise money and teaches girls life skills like goal setting and entrepreneurship.

Twinkle, Twinkle: Some Illinois lawmakers want to make sure the twinkle in your eye doesn't come from jewelry. Repulsed by a body modification offered at a Dutch institute — where tiny metal hearts and half-moons are surgically embedded in the whites of the eye — one lawmaker has proposed legislation that would make it a felony to implant jewelry in someone's eye. The procedure involves making a tiny slice in the membrane covering the eye and slipping in a small, flat piece of metal. The procedure is performed under local anesthetic.

Ha-Ha Healthy: A good belly laugh may have repercussions all the way up to the heart. Research presented at the March meeting of the American College of Cardiology shows that laughter causes the endothelium, the inner lining of blood vessels, to dilate. This increases blood flow which is good for overall cardiovascular health. Harvard University researchers had previously reported that people with an optimistic outlook also have a reduced risk of heart disease.

Lawsuit Reform not a Priority: A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health found reducing malpractice jury awards ranked 11th on a list of 12 items people thought should be health care priorities for the president and Congress. The Bush administration feels litigation is a core reason for high medical bills. The top priority of respondents was lowering the cost of health care and insurance, followed closely by making Medicare more financially sound and increasing the number of Americans with insurance.

A New Wrinkle: A dangerous Botox knockoff has recently paralyzed at least four people. Botox® is a popular non-surgical injection that blocks nerve impulses, temporarily paralyzing the muscles that cause wrinkles while giving the skin a smoother, more refreshed appearance. Although the FDA-approved Botox has no known serious side effects when used correctly, the demand and expense for Botox has led to a thriving black market in bootleg or substitute products sold at cut-rate prices — without any safety protections at all.

Risky or Overused?: CNN reports complaints to the Food and Drug Administration regarding drug side effects and other related health problems reached an all-time high in 2004. The federal agency received about 422,500 adverse-event reports from pharmaceutical companies, health professionals and patients, up nearly 14 percent from the 370,887 reports filed in 2003. The 2004 increase occurred during a year that saw rising questions about prescription drug safety. However, a top FDA official said the rise reflects a surge in prescription drug use, not an increase in health risk.

CASE STUDY (see reverse for enter and win details): In February, nearly 25% of U.S. consumers who ordered cheaper prescription drugs from Canadian pharmacies received letters from the Food and Drug Administration instead of their shipments of medicine. The FDA seized packages of arthritis, cholesterol and other medicines imported from Canada through I-SaveRx, a program created by Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich meant to save consumers money by filling prescriptions from pharmacies in Canada and Europe. Illinois, Wisconsin, Kansas, Missouri and Vermont, participate in I-SaveRx. The letter received by patients reads: "A mail shipment addressed to you from a foreign country is being held by the Post Office at the request of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration" and cites possible federal import violations. "These laws are designed to protect you from, among other things, unsafe or misrepresented foods, drugs, biologics, cosmetics, devices and other articles," the letter says. Opponents of the imported prescription drug program argue it is unsafe, illegal, and unethical because Canadian physicians re-write prescriptions for patients they have never seen or examined. Supporters counter that it is unethical to deprive consumers, primarily the elderly and uninsured, of life-saving medications because they can't afford them. **Given the FDA's obvious concern about the safety of imported drugs, should U.S. citizens be allowed to take that chance in exchange for prescription drugs they might not otherwise be able to afford? (To enter contest, see details on back page)**

Sleep Tight, Don't Let the Bedbugs Bite: Bedbugs, which feast on human blood at night, are increasingly biting back around the world. The current invasion of North America, Australia, and Western Europe is highlighted in a new study published by the Institute of Biology, London. Bedbugs are notoriously difficult to locate. They hide in mattresses and furniture, under floorboards, and even inside electrical equipment, emerging to feed only when it's dark. Adult bedbugs can survive up to a year without blood, allowing infestations to persist through periods when properties are vacant.

Doctors Demand Information: Just before the 2nd anniversary of the Iraqi war on March 20, a top group of public-health physicians poured scorn on the official Iraqi civilian death toll of 3,853. An October 2004 estimate published in *The Lancet* put the figure closer to 100,000. The *British Medical Journal* published a statement signed by 23 leading specialists from five countries (the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada and Spain) which argued "Understanding the causes of death is a core public-health responsibility." The British Foreign Office and the United States say they have no legal responsibility under the Geneva Convention to count civilian casualties.

Education Jackpot: Research in March's *Neuropsychology* shows college educations don't just boost careers, they may also help keep brains sharp later in life. The study gives clues as to how higher education buffers people from age-related declines in intellect and suggests added years of education are associated with increased activity in the brain's frontal lobes. This frontal cortex is engaged by older adults -- especially those who are highly educated -- as an alternative network that may aid memory and other intellectual tasks as they age.

Crazy Radio: Radio La Colifata, which in Buenos Aires slang means Crazy Radio, is the first radio show in the world to broadcast live from a mental hospital. Mr Cesar, a patient, believes that for his own recovery, it was more powerful than drugs. "The doctors are very technical," he says. "They give you a pill and tell you to sleep, and then you are cancelled out...The radio releases you and the wall around the hospital no longer exists." More than a therapy, the show has proven popular with an estimated 12 million listeners.

Family Value: To combat a shrinking population, a small town in northern Japan has decided to give a cash award worth about \$9,600 to each female resident who has a third child. The declining national birthrate is raising concerns about how future generations will support the growing ranks of elderly and how businesses will survive as the labor pool shrinks. To encourage families to have more children, the central government has also started building more day-care centers and encouraging men to take paternity leave.

Sticky Situation: A chemical used to make the nonstick substance Teflon is being considered by the Environmental Protection Agency as a potential health risk. The EPA said that exposure to even low levels of PFOA could pose "a potential risk of developmental and other adverse effects." Officials emphasized their draft risk assessment was based on animal studies and was not conclusive. Teflon maker Du Pont agreed, however, to pay as much as \$343 million to settle charges it contaminated drinking water in West Virginia and Ohio with PFOA over the past 50 years.

Something In The Water: How do you quench someone's thirst when there is plenty of water, but not a drop of it is drinkable? NASA researchers have pondered the question for nearly two decades, but villagers in Iraq and tsunami victims in Asia will get a taste of their answer as early as this fall. The Marshall Space Flight Center has been testing a device intended for the space station that would recycle astronauts' sweat, respiration and even urine into drinking water, reportedly purer than any water found in a tap.

Alarm at the Pentagon: The Associated Press reported new claims that the anti-malarial drug Lariam, given to tens of thousands of troops sent to Iraq, has provoked disturbing and dangerous behavior. The families of some troops blame the drug for the suicides of their loved ones. The drug's manufacturer warned of rare but severe side effects including paranoia and hallucinations. In written guidance on the drug last year, the military urged commanders to send for a medical evaluation anyone who showed behavioral changes after taking the drug, "especially ... if they carry a weapon."

One Bill Gates = \$46.5 billion: Investment of little more than four billion dollars a year could slash the global death rate among newborn babies by 61 percent, according to research. Each year, four million babies die in the first four weeks of life, 99 percent of them in developing countries. Many of the deaths could be prevented by simple, low-cost initiatives, such as folic acid supplements, tetanus vaccination, anti-malaria treatment, better hygiene in hospital delivery rooms and improved monitoring of pregnancies to spot any complications, a study published in *The Lancet* suggests.

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: _____