

## "DC" On-Line

Brian Sutton, DC

### MDs Are an Open Book in Massachusetts

Massachusetts has become the first state in the United States to provide consumer information on licensed medical physicians. As of September 20, thanks to a bill signed into law by that state's governor, patients can dial an 800 number and find out about their doctor's malpractice history and criminal convictions, among other statistics. By next May, such information is expected to be available on the Internet.<sup>1</sup>

1. United Press, August 9, 1996.

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### Placebos for Prozac -- About the Same Effect

An analysis of 39 studies of depression patients suggests that the placebo effect improves the condition just about as much as the pharmacological preparations Prozac, Zoloft, and Paxil. Psychologists at the University of Connecticut also found no difference between treatment with medication and psychotherapy only. According to one of the researchers, "People benefiting from drugs are benefiting because they think that taking the antidepressant medication is working."<sup>2</sup>

2. Dr. Guy Sapirstein, who reported the findings of his work with Dr. Irving Kirsch at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association.

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### Depressed? Try St. John's Wort

A popular folk medicine for depression and anxiety actually seems to work, says a study in the British Medical Journal.<sup>3</sup> In fact, St. John's wort (*hypericum perforatum*) seems to be a better choice than most drugs since side effects are significantly fewer. It even worked better than placebos, they say. The compounds found in the herb that are thought to have a therapeutic effect include naphodianthrons, flavonoids, xanthones, and bioflavonoids.

3. BMJ, August 3, 1996.

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### Effectiveness of Emphysema Surgery Questioned -- Study Proposed

In an effort to settle controversy over a surgical procedure used frequently in emphysema patients, the National Heart, Blood, and Lung Institute is proposing a controlled study of the technique. The procedure, which can total \$20,000 per patient, involves the removal of heavily damaged areas of the lungs in an effort to make better use of the healthier portions. A number of surgical centers

using the surgery report that many of their patients improve substantially. Critics of the procedure say that the results are only temporary. About five percent of those undergoing the operation die from the procedure. We should know the results of the study in about eight years.

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#### Symmetry -- A Gauge of "Genetic Fitness?"

An evolutionary biologist from Britain's Manchester University is using body symmetry as a gauge of "genetic fitness." After measuring index finger lengths, wrist and ankle widths, ear sizes and other comparisons, he says he can predict such things as risk of breast cancer in women, quantity of ejaculate in men, and attractiveness of an individual to the opposite sex. Asymmetry, he says, is an indication of underlying developmental disease that decreases a person's genetic potential.<sup>4</sup> Sounds quite like sentiments I've heard expressed in chiropractic pediatric circles for years now.

4. Robin Baker, speaking at a conference on human behavior in Vienna. Reuter, August 9, 1996.

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#### "Defect" Correlates to HIV Immunity

A "abnormal" variation of a protein found on white blood cells called the CKR5 co-receptor is being studied for an apparent HIV anti-infective quality. Researchers from the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Centre in New York have found a high correlation of the protein with HIV resistance. About one in 100 Caucasians are thought to carry the gene combination that seems to produce a near immunity to the virus. Another 20 percent have one-half the genetic complement which researchers think lends partial immunity. No other effect of having the variant protein has been noted. A number of individuals with very high risk for HIV infection who never tested positive were involved in the study. Only a small number of these showed this type of protein; researchers still don't have any idea why the rest of the volunteers seem to be immune.<sup>5</sup>

5. Cell, August 9, 1996.

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#### Hyperphagic Short Stature Syndrome

A new syndrome has been described in The Lancet medical journal<sup>6</sup> called "hyperphagic short stature syndrome." The condition is diagnosed in children who fail to grow normally despite compulsive eating. Blood tests show a decreased growth hormone level. Researchers think that the condition is a result of emotional stresses in their home life, for when they are removed from their families to a hospital setting, their appetites and blood chemistries return to normal in just a few days.

6. The Lancet, August 10, 1996.

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#### Carpal Tunnel Surgery Assailed

The author of the book, *Occupation and Disease: How Social Factors Affect the Conception of Work Related Disorders*, says that a very large number of the 240,000 carpal tunnel operations

performed in the U.S. each year are useless or worse. While doctors claim an 85-95 percent success rate for their surgeries, another expert in the field says that among the patients she has spoken to the rate of satisfaction was closer to one percent.<sup>7</sup>

Many patients are undergoing multiple surgeries, which can cause complications ranging from excessive scar tissue overgrowth (re-compressing the nerve tunnel) to surgical injuries that leave the fingers totally devoid of sensation.<sup>8</sup> Other researchers are warning that misdiagnoses are more often the rule than the exception. "By the time we've completely mutilated the person, maybe then we'll decide it's not carpal tunnel syndrome after all," says one epidemiologist.<sup>9</sup>

7. Stephanie Barnes, director of the Association for Repetitive Motion Syndromes in Santa Rosa.

8. United Press, August 8, 1996.

9. Barbara Silverstein, research director at the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, Olympia, Washington.

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### Cancer and Fiber

Various studies have shown a correlation between a high-fiber diet and lessened cancer and heart disease risks, but at least one cancer researcher says that merely taking fiber supplements is probably a pointless proposition.<sup>10</sup> Human studies of fiber pills and fortified cereals seem to indicate that there is more to the effect than what may be contributed by fiber itself. He thinks that there is a synergistic effect of the various components of whole foods such as fruits and vegetables.<sup>11</sup>

10. Dr. Harpreet Wasan of Britain's Imperial Cancer Research Fund.

11. The Lancet, August 3, 1996.

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### Household Toxins May Affect Reproduction

The Greater Boston Physicians for Social Responsibility are voicing concerns about the potential effects of accumulated household toxins on human reproductive health. A number of chemicals are thought to affect the reproductive system, and very little research has been done on interactions. Chemicals used in flea collars, pesticides, dry cleaning, and a variety of cleaning and construction chemicals are thought to cause problems ranging from menstrual disorders and lowered sperm counts to spontaneous abortion. They have published a report expressing their concerns, *Generations At Risk*, co-authored by the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group.<sup>12</sup>

12. Reuter, August 1, 1996.

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### Organic Food Boon

Investors are pouring millions of dollars into the natural organic food industry, now a \$2 billion business in the United States. Organic foods are catching on so well that the agriculture department is considering setting standards for them.<sup>13</sup>

A number of points are being considered, including just how "natural" a farming technique needs to be. People vary quite a bit on their reasons for selecting organic foods: some are more concerned about the environmental impacts of farming techniques, while others emphasize wholesomeness and nutritional content of the food itself.

13. Associated Press, August 10, 1996.

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### Space Seeds

Chinese scientists who sent vegetable seeds into space to investigate the effect of vacuum, radiation, and gravitational changes a few years ago found lower germination rates and poor yields from the subsequently planted crop. But in a surprise to many, the next generation seems to be superior to ordinary plants. These plants, descended from the original space-traveling seeds, are bearing more and bigger fruits that ripen 11 days earlier. Laboratory tests indicate that chlorophyll and vitamin contents are 20 percent higher than that seen in the normal earth-bound plants.<sup>14</sup>

14. OTC news service, August 9, 1996.

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