

## "DC" On-Line

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### Vaccine Problems

In early April, in West Bengal, India, 11 children died within a day of taking an oral polio vaccine. Thirty-four others were hospitalized in serious condition. The reason for the severe reactions was not known at the time of this writing. The vaccine was administered by a government-run clinic, which has since been burned down by angry villagers.<sup>1</sup>

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### Cardiac Treatment Varies by Region

An analysis of nationwide Medicare statistics by Dr. Norman Kato of UCLA Medical Center shows that heart treatments in the elderly vary quite widely across the country. For example, for patients with identical conditions, one living in North Dakota is four times more likely to get a coronary bypass operation than one who resides in Wyoming.

Your cardiologist is very likely to recommend angioplasty if you are in Missouri, compared to New York cardiologists who suggest the procedure at one-fourth the rate.

You might think that this may be due to regional preferences in treatment modalities, i.e., if the angioplasty rate is high, bypass operations are done less frequently. However, this is not the case. The areas with high rates of angioplastic surgery also tend to have a high rate of coronary bypass operations.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, patients in those areas of high surgical intervention don't seem to fare any better.

According to Dr. Kato, himself a surgeon, "Bypass surgery and angioplasty have become growth industries."

Another study done by Dr. Louise Pilote of the Cleveland Clinic found similar regional variations, this time in post-heart attack patients. She found that New England cardiologists were much more conservative in their treatment procedures and that those same doctors were also much more likely to prescribe heart medications in accord with current research.

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### Risk Factors for Hip Fractures

A new study<sup>3</sup> has been released that itemizes some of the indicators of future hip fractures in women. Besides osteoporosis, they include:

- use of valium and similar sedatives
- tallness

- high caffeine consumption
- lack of walking or spending little time on their feet
- poor depth perception
- rapid pulse rate
- lack of weight

Pertaining to weight, it was found that obese women are less likely to break a hip. Some ascribe this effect to increased padding or more estrogen. It may also have something to do with the bone reaction to added gravitational stresses.

About a quarter of a million Americans fracture a hip annually.

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## Kidney Thefts

Authorities in India are cracking down on unscrupulous surgeons who have been taking patients' kidneys without their knowledge or permission. Police in one city say they have traced 1,000 people who lost their kidney to doctors who had asked them to donate blood.

Another victim consulted a doctor for a stomach ache. He was told he had a tumor that needed to be removed. Four years later, he found out that the "tumor" that was taken was actually his kidney.

Kidneys are hot items in many countries, and in Bombay a kidney transplant is worth from 8 to 14 thousand dollars. People in need of quick cash frequently sell a kidney for the equivalent of approximately \$1,000.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, theft of body parts for sale on the black market has become quite a phenomena in many areas of the world. There have been accounts from Argentina of mental institution employees using coffee spoons to remove eyes (for the cornea) from patients, large numbers of street children in Honduras being killed for their organs, and hospitals taking donor patients' organs before they die or only keeping a dying patient alive until an organ is harvested and sold.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Robert Mendelsohn used to warn against checking off the organ donor box on your driver's license because you might be worth more dead than alive to a hospital after a traumatic injury.

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## Transplanting Refurbished Hearts

Heart transplant surgery is big business nowadays. In fact, there is such a big demand for hearts that surgeons at the University of California at Los Angeles have begun using less-than-healthy hearts in some of their older patients.

The doctors patch up the donated hearts by performing coronary artery bypasses before placing them in their new host. About 60 percent of the patients, who range from 50 to 70 years old, survive at least a year after the surgery.<sup>6</sup>

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## Smoking Triggers LDL Oxidation

A study<sup>7</sup> performed at the University of Southern California School of Medicine has found that the low density lipoprotein of smokers oxidizes 40 percent faster than non-smokers, thus accelerating arterial plaque build-up. This seems to be a promising lead in determining the precise mechanism of smoking's effects on the cardiovascular system.

Researchers believe that this oxidation accounts for the largest portion of smokers' poor cardiovascular health.

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### Bladder Infections and Birth Control

Women whose partners use condoms are twice as likely to develop bladder infections as those who use oral contraceptives, according to a study at the University of Michigan.<sup>8</sup> If they use spermicides, a cervical cap or a diaphragm then the risk is three times higher.

Researchers say that irritation caused by the condoms makes tissues susceptible to pathogenic bacteria while spermicidal preparations inhibit protective bacteria in the vagina. In either case, unhealthy bacteria proliferation spreads to the bladder.

Overall, women who abstain from sex have only an 11 percent risk of infection compared to those who have vaginal sex.

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### Flaxseed and Breast Cancer

The University of Toronto has begun clinical trials to assess the effectiveness of dietary flaxseed in breast cancer treatment. This was prompted by a study of rats that showed mammary tumor growth reductions of more than 50 percent.<sup>9</sup>

Elevated estrogen levels seem to be related to breast cancer. Flaxseed contains compounds (lignans) that seem to inhibit absorption of estrogen-forming substances from the diet. Researchers caution against consuming large quantities of flaxseed until more is known about its effects.

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### Heavy Workload during Pregnancy Robs Baby

In a preliminary report of a study<sup>10</sup> of pregnant women in active jobs, researchers conclude that long periods of activity will lower the birth weight of the baby. The effect is most pronounced during the second trimester when rapid growth is occurring. Lack of periodic rest is blamed for a large part of the problem, but it was also discovered that many of the women were so busy they were skipping meals.

A more conclusive data analysis will be available in about a year.

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### Television Violence Leads to Coronary Heart Disease

At least that's the conclusion reached by an unnamed Duke University researcher.<sup>11</sup> Duke did a study of 40 persons while they watched movies and found, unsurprisingly enough, that viewers' blood pressure and stress hormone levels increased during the violent scenes.

What is interesting is that they related these increases to the immune system decline one sees in chronically stressed individuals, making a case for diminished disease resistance in persons who spend a large part of their life taking in such films.

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### Cataract Surgeon Wants His Cut

A Sun City, Arizona ophthalmologist is suing his colleagues for patent infringement. Dr. Samuel Pallin has patented a "frown-shaped surgical incision" that requires no stitches and wants every surgeon who uses it to pay him \$5 per cut.<sup>12</sup> While it appears that a few others have used similar methods before Dr. Pallin reported his success, he was the one to obtain a patent.

A California doctor received a patent for his procedure of determining the sex of an unborn child and subsequently demanded royalties from obstetricians. His procedure was to look at an ultrasound image for the external genitalia.

Many countries prohibit such "method" patents, and it seems likely that Congress will consider similar measures soon.

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### City Water and Alzheimer's Disease

Researchers at the Australian Institute for Biomedical Research have shown that a water treatment method leaves residual aluminum, in its most toxic form, dissolved in drinking water. They have demonstrated passage of aluminum into the brain from as little as one glass of water.

The president of the International Federation of Cell Biology says that there is more evidence that aluminum is involved in Alzheimer's disease than any other single factor. She says that, according to this study, the World Health Organization's standards for allowable aluminum concentrations in drinking water are probably 100 times too high.<sup>13</sup>

Aluminum sulfate (alum) is used by water treatment facilities to bind fine sediments before removal.

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### Protection from Appendicitis by Breastfeeding

A study of 444 children at the University of Naples has found that breastfeeding children for four months or more seems to make them less likely to suffer from appendicitis. The study is reported in the British Medical Journal.<sup>14</sup>

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