

The no-show patient never has the last appointment of the day

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There are federal laws. There are provincial laws. In this issue of *CMAJ* you will be introduced to Taylor's Laws, rules that appear in no legal or medical texts but are nonetheless true. For example, Taylor's Laws state that the no-show patient never has the last appointment of the day. I will present more of them in coming months. If you have any of your own to pass on, please get in touch.

An article in *Manitoba Medicine* (1990; 60: 59) suggests that the autopsy is invaluable in benefiting future patients. The title, "The autopsy as an aid to the better practice of medicine," is reminiscent of that old riddle, "Why is the pig a miraculous animal?" The answer, of course, is that it has to be killed to be cured.

Taylor's Law: Endoscopic equipment always works perfectly until you are demonstrating your technique to a visitor.

The Medicine Hat Regional Hospital was looking for a "diagnostic medical stenographer" (*Winnipeg Free Press*, Oct. 11, 1990). In-

trigued, I read further. The advertisement added that "experience in intracavity sonography would be an asset." I suppose an ultrasound technician who can type or a typist who can perform ultrasound might be one way around a backlog of reports.

Pocket pagers transmit truly urgent messages only when placed in a car during a rush-hour traffic jam.

— Taylor's Law

Women in the barrios of Santo Domingo are now receiving advice about contraception and family planning from their local hairdressers (*Fam Plann Enterp* 1990; Aug: 1). The women find the beauty shops less crowded and more discreet than government-run clinics. It's not the first time this type of thing has happened. Barber surgeons in England used to perform surgical removals of bladder stones. "What'll it be today, sir, short back and sides or a lithotomy?"

Taylor's Law: Laboratory reports crucial to the next stage of management never go missing unless the patient has travelled at least 400 km.

The letters column in *Fertility and Sterility* (1990; 54: 1184) caught my eye. The title of one was: "Factors affecting scrotal temperature in monkeys." I pondered this while glancing outside my window, where the temperature was -34°C . The original brass monkey, by the way, was a triangular piece of the metal used to hold a pile of cannon balls. When it contracted in cold weather the projectiles fell off.

The Hanford Nuclear Foundation (*Globe and Mail*, Toronto, Oct. 17, 1990) is eagerly awaiting 15.9 tonnes of radioactive feces, the end product of a series of experiments performed on beagles in the 1950s. Dr. Phil Hall of Winnipeg tells me that nuclear dumping has taken on an entirely new meaning.

Taylor's Law: Patients who need detailed explanations of their medical problems will invariably bring along a hyperactive 3-year-old to share the consultation.

"When everyone is somebody, then no one's anybody." That's a

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line from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers* and it is appropriate when considering the 8600 medals awarded to 7000 US troops after the invasion of Grenada (*Globe and Mail*, Toronto, Sept. 7, 1990).

I find the commercials aired on American television distasteful, particularly the ones touting the purported excellence of specific hospitals. It saddens me to think that medicine is daily being reduced to a simple consumer product. This consumerism is sometimes startlingly described (*Int J Fertil* 1990; 35: 330). A woman discontinued oral contraception and 2 months later found a physician willing to administer the potent Pergonal to gratify her whim to conceive twins. The whirring sound you hear is Hippocrates turning in his grave.

Taylor's Law: No matter which check-in desk is chosen, the passenger immediately ahead of you will speak neither English nor French, will want to take a mon-goose as cabin baggage, and will have a ticket routing him to Kelowna, Vancouver, Hawaii, Sydney, Manilla and Hong Kong.

Dr. J. Cohen (*Hum Reprod* 1990; 5: 1029) surely has produced the last word on medical acronyms. His article "Simplifying the proliferation of excess reproductive meanings (SPERM)" contains 71 of them, including CABO, for continuous assisted but delayed orgasm, and EROS, for ejaculation in response to opposite sex. The author assures us that all 71 have been transmitted to the Organization for Registration of the Growth of Acronyms in Science and Medicine. I'm sure, gentle reader, that you can work that one out for yourself.

As a junior obstetrician in Ulster, it was not unusual to meet the multiparous patient about to de-

liver her 10th baby. There has been a remarkable fall in family size in Canada in the last two decades (*Can Soc Trends* 1990; 18 (autumn): 32-34). In 1986, 14% of two-parent families had three or more children at home; in 1966 the total was 32%. In 1966, 9% of families had five or more children at home; by 1986, only 1 family in 100 did.

"The habit, when once acquired, is, in some respects, the worst of all drug habits because it leads to mental, moral and physical degeneration more rapidly than with the narcotic drugs of addiction." This statement about cocaine was not offered during the current war against illicit drugs; it was made by Dr. W. E. Dixon in the December 1930 edition of *CMAJ* (pages 747-756).

Taylor's Law: Pocket pagers transmit truly urgent messages only when placed in a car during a rush-hour traffic jam.

There is a trivia quiz (*Manitoba Med* 1990; 60: 88) called "Trifles -?" Through it, I learned of the ACHOO (autosomal dominant compelling helio-ophthalmic) syndrome. I also learned that James Boswell, Samuel Johnson's biographer, experienced 19 attacks of urethritis. These were described in a medical essay entitled "Boswell's Clap," a title that is both succinct and accurate. By the way, ACHOO describes sneezing that occurs when a bright light shines in the eyes.

T.S. Eliot (1888-1956) thought the world would end "not with a bang but a whimper." Obviously, he had not worked in Australian crematoria. Undertakers there are at risk from exploding corpses (*Globe and Mail*, Toronto, Jan. 5, 1991). Apparently cremation causes the batteries that power pacemakers to go off like 40-cm shells. ■

THERAPEUTIC INDEX INDEX THÉRAPEUTIQUE

Analgesic

Anaprox DS 910, 911, 914

Angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitor

Prinivil 927, 928, 929, Inside Front Cover

Anorectal therapy

Proctosedyl HC 875

Antianginal agent

Transderm-Nitro 834, 930

Antibacterial agent

Cipro 858, 902, 903

Antibiotic

Ceclor 850, 918

Antihistaminic

Benadryl 898, 899, 921

Antihypertensive agent

Minipress 846, 847, 919

Anti-inflammatory agent

Naprosyn SR 836, 906
Voltaren SR 924, 925, Outside Back Cover

Antineoplastic agent

Ergamisol 868, 926

Bronchodilator

Pulmicort 838, 925

Bronchial anti-inflammatory agent

Tilade 864 A,B,C,D

Cholesterol-lowering agent

Mevacor 876, 922, 923

Histamine H₁ receptor antagonist

Claritin 848, 918

Histamine H₂ receptor antagonist

Pepcid 920, 921, Inside Back Cover

Pediatric asthma prophylactic

Zaditen 886, 887, 893