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## President's Page

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## President's Page



### *Reflections on Current Events*

For many years now, I have had the habit of scanning the daily newspaper and saving certain articles that appear to me, an obstetrician, to have a special impact on social, national or worldly events. Some of the articles that were put aside include such topics as "Teen-Age Pregnancies", "Prenatal Care for Everyone" and "Ways to Insure the Working Poor".<sup>1,2</sup> These topics are rather mundane and imply that someone was trying to do some good for society in general.

More recently however, the topics are "out of this world" with such terms as "Pre-Embryos", "In-Vitro Fertilization", "Surrogate Motherhood", "Multifetal Gestation: The Role of Selective First Trimester Termination", "Transplant Shopping" and "High Drama in High Court".<sup>3,4,5</sup> The recent Supreme Court decision to allow the states to have more jurisdiction over the termination of the unborn life has been labeled "The Vietnam of the 90s", citing that it will divide the country again into factions of pro-life vs. pro-choice and that this will have serious consequences for all politicians and for the country.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

The press has its own way of coloring the news with the columnists as the "High Priests" of interpreting the news. Not all of this is bad. For example, Ellen Goodman legitimately asks the question of "Just What are Seven Pre-Embryos?" and points out that this subject ". . . would become an ethicist's delight and a lawyer's nightmare."<sup>8</sup> Cal Thomas, in his "Pro-Life Proposal", compares the Civil Rights sit-ins of the 1960s with the "Anti-Abortion" demonstrators of today.<sup>9</sup> It is ironic that today's anti-abortion demonstrators are jailed in the same facility that Dr. Martin Luther King,

Jr. was jailed in in 1960!

On the other hand, Russell Baker in his column "Transplant Shopping" compares the practicing physician to the car salesman, stating that the car salesman is "... socially suspect ... probably a sharpster who will end up conning us, or such at least is the popular idea of him, though he may often have a noble soul and be a lover of humanity and a tireless church worker." Mr. Baker continues with, "... a doctor may just as easily be a fraud, a perjurer, a leacher, a swindler, a wife-beater; yet, when we think 'doctor' we think respectfully, even reverentially."<sup>4</sup> What can we expect from society when leading columnists compare a doctor to a car salesman and in this unfavorable light? What ever happened to the public image of the "Divine Physician" in Whom we as physicians should all aspire?

The problem of teen-age pregnancies has reached enormous proportions and has become a national concern. Dr. James Haughton, former Director of Public Health in Houston, in 1985 said, "These are children having children", giving the statistics that 2.9% of teen-age pregnancies occurred to "mothers" between 10 and 14 years age! Another 38% were to "mothers" between 15 to 17 years of age. The infant mortality in this group (11.1 per 1000 per live births) was above the national average (10.6 per 1000) and was highest among blacks (15.2 per 1000).<sup>10</sup>

Advocates of better prenatal care cite that \$400 for expectant mother services can save a thousand times that amount in lifetime care costs for a low birth-weight infant, which can reach \$400,000. Twenty-six percent of women of childbearing age have no maternity insurance and two-thirds of these (9.5 million) women have no health insurance at all! "The sum of money needed is not as much of a problem as the lack of will to make a national commitment to tackle the problem in a comprehensive way".<sup>11</sup> (Compare this potential cost with \$175 billion per year to defend West Germany and \$29 billion to defend Japan.)<sup>12</sup>

If we are to compare the abortion decision to Vietnam, some interesting statistics are available. In the 10 years of the Vietnam War, some 56,000 lives were lost. In 10 years since the Supreme Court Decisions of 1973, approximately 15 million unborn children were sacrificed. Think of it! We are destroying ourselves! Approximately 1.5 million of these unborn children would now be 16 years of age which means that some, at least, would now be taxpayers. So now, with the aged living longer and the unborn being destroyed by abortion, the social security system is in trouble because there are not enough young people to pay for the social security of the elderly!

By and large, current events reported in the news are a reflection of the state of society today. Another columnist, Tom Kennedy of the *Houston Post*, recently compared the "Top Seven School Problems in the 1940s" with the "Top Seven School Problems of the 1980s".<sup>13</sup> Reported problems in the '40s included talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in the halls, cutting in line, dress code violations and littering. In the '80s we deal with drug abuse, alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape,

robbery and assault. This comparison illustrates how far we have wandered and the serious consequences facing the student of today.

The modern physician is exposed to a plethora of news articles describing the rapid developments in medical technology. He must make conscientious decisions regarding what is scientifically possible and yet morally permissible. He must "separate the chaff from the wheat" in applying those scientific discoveries for the care of his patients. This is not easily done . . . but there is hope! Some who were once pro-choice are now staunchly pro-life!<sup>14,15,16</sup>

The moral struggle in medicine today is the determination of what is right and what is wrong in the new technologies available. The physician should not and will not be overwhelmed by these scientific advances if he will remember the basics of his Hippocratic Oath and apply his moral principles with a clear conscience.

— **Joseph A. Lucci, Jr., M.D., F.A.C.O.G.**  
**President**

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