Second Opinions

Fatherly admonition
Concerning the obituary "Waldo Nelson, 'father of pediatrics,' dead at 98," April AAP News, I always thought that Abraham Jacobi was the father of American pediatrics.

In fact, according to the article, Dr. Nelson won the Jacobi Award in 1969. Paternity (before DNA analysis) has always been difficult to prove.

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'Homo economicus'? I fully share the concerns expressed by Drs. G. Comerchi and R. Heyman in their Commentary (April AAP News) to the Periodic Survey of AAP Fellows titled "Issues Surrounding Drug Legalization." Together with the authors of the commentary, I regret that a significant number of AAP fellows underappreciate: the role of marijuana as a potentially detrimental factor in young adolescents' development and behavior; marijuana's addictive qualities; and marijuana as an introductory substance in the chronic use of alcohol and hard illicit drugs.

To insist that the best way to win the war on drugs is to stop waging it is one example of the outrageous misunderstandings that abound on what the proliferation of drugs will mean to the future of our children.

Legalization of drugs would open up a Pandora's box and would transform our country into a stage of social Darwinism: naturally, the fittest of our children will survive, but what about the weak?

What if the weak individual happens to be your son or daughter? Shall we sacrifice one, two or more generations of people trying to prove the obvious fact — drugs, including marijuana, have a devastating effect on the lives and minds of children?

One rationale for the appeal to legalize drugs is economic. But can we transfer the language of money into the price of human life lost to drugs? Would those who propose to legalize drugs for other people also be willing to apply this to their own children? Are they ready to put a price on their own child's life? Are we still Homo sapiens with hearts of humans, or have we become Homo economicus?

Drug and alcohol addiction is one of mankind's movements toward self-destruction; sometimes the devastation of addiction is immediate, and sometimes it takes a longer period of time.

The blind application of the dogma of freedom of choice ignores the fact that this choice was formulated not for people to whom freedom meant the right to be destructive, but for people to whom freedom meant the right to lead a productive life.

Many of us practicing physicians know all too well what results in freedom of choice exercised by pregnant mothers using cocaine and alcohol during pregnancy. Their future children, each of whom is potentially an individual with human rights equal to the rights of their mothers, have no freedom of choice during the first, most critical nine months of their development: their life in utero. During this period, their mothers' blood provides them not only with life-sustaining fluids, but also with toxic substances that frequently affect their developing brains irreversibly.

Pediatrics, as one part of the medical professions, is guided by the ethos of the Hippocratic oath, which says: "I will prescribe a regimen for the good of my patients according to my ability and my judgment and never do harm to anyone."

The nulli me nocere principle, and no other political or economic considerations, should govern pediatricians, entrusted with the role of children's healers and protectors, in our approach toward legalization and decriminalization of marijuana or any other illicit drug.

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Another look at lice
For the most part, I have found AAP News to be an excellent means by which to remain "in contact" with the medical field. However, after reading Dr. Penso's commentary in the March issue, I am concerned about the limitations of his contact with reality!

Head lice issues do not compare with social issues such as gangs, violence, drugs, teen pregnancy, low standards and drop-outs, which, according to Dr. Penso, schools are reportedly "unable or unwilling to deal with."

As a nationally certified school nurse, I do not see administrators placing inappropriate attention on either issue. They are completely separate and unrelated.

Children who are lice-infested pose a threat to other children from the simple standpoint that the pests are hardly "benign," which Taber's defines as "not recurrent or progressive." Head lice are tremendously recurrent if not dealt with properly, and lice definitely pose a progressive distraction in an academic environment. They are not "readily eradicated" by anything!

As for periods of absenteeism due to head lice, noncompliant parents, lack of education and financial constraints are the issues, not school policy.

Speaking of school policy, let's not unjustly and inappropriately criticize our academic institutions for social dysfunction. Just because we as a nation have an increasing lack of respect for human life, the family unit and authority in general doesn't mean that school systems are unable or unwilling to deal with it. They have no choice!

Ridiculing schools for policies concerning head lice and social dysfunction, when Dr. Penso's real issue is frustration over HMO bureaucracy, is absurd. So is trying to find head lice among the plagues of Egypt. Blood, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock disease, boils, hail, locusts and death to firstborn Egyptian sons...yes. Head lice? Not hardly! (Exodus 7:14-12:30)

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