

Keeping injuries secret threat to sports integrity

There's not much good about HIPPA, the Health Insurance Portability and Privacy Act, unless you're a bureaucrat or a privacy freak.

It's costing us billions of dollars as the health industry changes everything to meet new federal regulations, but there's little benefit to the average consumer.

And there are some real problems created by this whacked-out law. As usual, when Congress changes things, it's the unintended consequences that come back to haunt us.

Preachers can't find out who they need to visit in the hospital. Newspapers can't get lists of hospital admissions, so friends don't know when people are laid up. Hospitals lose their connection to the community.

One of the more esoteric dangers has been little remarked, though, and that's the threat to the integrity of professional and amateur sports.

It's been the tradition, for many years, for sports teams to make full public disclosure when an athlete is injured. That puts the information out in the open and creates a level playing field for information.

With the new law, though, that's not happening anymore, at least in college and school competition. Many schools are afraid they will run afoul of federal law and are no longer releasing information on injuries.

The University of Kansas, for instance, has never said why quarterback Bill Whitemore missed three games this year. Whitemore went down under an avalanche of purple in the K-State game. All the school would say was that he couldn't play. News accounts referred to "a possible shoulder injury."

That's dangerous. It creates a situation where insider information might become so valuable that gamblers will corrupt sports teams to get it. It's happened before.

While we don't like to admit it, there is a lot of gambling on sports, even though it's illegal in most states. Any time an illegal operation generates a lot of cash, corruption can't be far behind.

It'd be easy to say that we shouldn't concern ourselves with the problems of gamblers, but that's not quite the case. Illegal gambling is run by crooks who'd think nothing of spreading bribes around to gain an edge.

Some might scoff, but gamblers have shown over and over, from the Blacksox scandal to Pete Rose and friends, that the potential for corruption is never far away.

Sports information needs to be run like the stock market: the facts need to be out in the open, and everyone needs to have access to the same set.

Athletes, from high school through the pros, should agree when they join a team that they give up any right to privacy with respect to injuries or illnesses that might affect performance. There's nothing wrong with that.

Joining a team is a voluntary act, and there is no God-given — or constitutional — right to play football.

Players ought to be able to control their own information and waive their privacy rights. But if necessary, Congress should change this law before a sports scandal shows us just how wrong it is.

It'd be folly to wait until after the fact to see what's happening here. — *Steve Haynes*



You say paté, but Asa sees Alpo

Asa loves parties. He loves the people, the food, the drink and especially the crumbs.

We were invited to a dinner party at the home of Dean and Sue Mills in Columbia, Mo.

Dean is the dean of the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri. We got our invitation to the party because the National Newspaper Association has its home on the MU campus and Steve is a director of the association.

The Millses live just outside of Columbia in a beautiful country home on the side of the hill with their two dogs.

We met the first dog — a big furry white sheep dog of some sort — on the walk up to the door.

He looked us over, decided we wouldn't harm his sheep, or anything else on the premises, and let us pass.

At the door, Sue took our coats and welcomed us. The house was aglow with lights and good smells and we could see pretzels and fancy hors d'oeuvres on the coffee table behind her. We could also see a large black dog helping himself to the paté.

As she turned around to show us the house, Sue also spotted the culprit.

This is a hostess' worst nightmare, animals on the table or in the



Open Season

By *Cynthia Haynes*
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food. She was cool, however. She shooed Asa off and cut off the section of paté that he had been sampling. Then she moved the food out of the way of his busy tongue and nose.

Denied the pleasure of paté — hey, it looked like dog food to me, too — Asa put nose to floor and spent the rest of the evening alternately putting his head under someone's hand to get a scratch and a pat, and his nose to the floor checking for crumbs.

I was reminded of the cat-and-bread incident.

We were living in Kansas City and had been married about a year with no children, just a cat.

Fancy breads were hard to get back in the '70s, but Steve had picked up a loaf of crusty Italian bread from a mob bakery across town.

He had taken the bread home and

then gone to pick me up at work. On the way home, he was singing the praises of his loaf of bread. We would have spaghetti and make it into garlic bread. It would be wonderful.

When we arrived home, we found the cat on the floor busily devouring the fancy bread. He had gone through about a third of the loaf.

Steve was stunned, furious and a little crazy. He grabbed the bread and chased the cat around the house, whopping it whenever he could.

I sat on a chair and laughed until it hurt.

It took a lot of soothing of ruffled feathers and a trip across town for another loaf of bread before he could see the humor in the situation.

Today, Steve, like Sue, would probably just cut off the damaged end and go on with his business. Sometimes, getting older and wiser is better. But it's not necessarily as much fun.

Big bin solves corn shortage

If nothing else, my husband is ingenious.

We needed a better way to haul, store and dispense the fuel for our corn-burning stove. Up 'til now, Jim had hauled it home in an open trailer, shoveled it into plastic buckets, and stacked them on the side porch. They were so heavy I had trouble carrying them, and it was time-consuming to always be filling buckets.

That's when he "hit" on the idea of putting wheels on an old combine bin and making a cover for it. He beefed up the legs with angle iron, added a tongue, and now all he has to do is hook it on to his pickup and away he goes.

The bin will hold about 50 bushels. When he gets a load, he can, with some fancy maneuvering, park it (more or less out of sight) behind the house. Then it's nothing for me to take two buckets out for corn. Two half-full buckets are much easier to carry than one completely full bucket.

At first, when he opened the corn chute, a bump on the lip of the chute sent the grain flying in all directions. Jim's motto, when you have a problem like that, is "Get a bigger hammer." A few swift licks with the sledge hammer straightened it right out, and now the corn flows in a nice, straight stream.

One thing about it, the squirrels love the "accidents" we have when the corn doesn't make it into the bucket.



Out Back

By *Carolyn Sue Kelley-Plotts*
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Halley got another invitation this year to a White House Christmas party. But it was already agreed last year that if she rated another invite, her sister would be the beneficiary. So Kara is the one this year who is making the plans for a trip to Washington.

She said she got a good deal on her airplane tickets and found the perfect dress, so she is all set. I know exactly how she feels right now. I could hardly believe it was possible for ME to be in the White House. Even standing right next to the President of the United States, it all seemed surreal. Like I was having an out-of-body experience and watching myself go through the motions of shaking his hand and speaking to him.

My opinion of him has not changed over the past year. If anything, I am even more convinced that God has his hand on President Bush. I think he is the only man who has the will and the strength of character to make the decisions that have had to be made.

Our friend Theo sent me a document that proves all of Santa's reindeer have to be female:

A field report from the Wildlife and Game Commission reveals that both male and female reindeer have antlers. The report went on to state that male reindeer shed their antlers in the fall while female reindeer retain theirs until after they give birth in the spring.

Given that every historical account of Santa and his sleigh depicts it being pulled by eight antlered reindeer, this can mean just one thing: pregnant females are the only ones who can pull this fat man — in a red velvet suit — around the world in one single night without getting lost.



A tale of sex and child abuse

If your 15-year-old daughter is having sex with her boyfriend, is that child abuse?

Would you want it reported to the state?

The courts will have to decide whether Attorney General Phill Kline did the right thing when he declared under-age sex to be child abuse which must be reported by health and child-welfare professionals.

A federal judge heard arguments in Wichita the other day on the ruling, and promised to make a decision later in the year.

What a mess. What Kline's office said, basically, is that it's against the law in Kansas to have sex with anyone under the age of 16. And because it's illegal, sex with an underage child is a form of child abuse.

Kline says that means that, under another Kansas law which requires professionals to report suspected child abuse, anyone who knows of underage sex is required to report it. The decision applies to any sex involving a child, even if both parties are underage and both consent to the behavior.

It's hard to know where to start. It hardly seems like the state's business if a couple of high school freshmen decide to have sex. It might worry their parents. The parents might well act.

But is it something you'd want reported to the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services?

Most parents, I'd suspect, would rather not sit down with a case-worker and talk about their child's love life.



Along the Sappa

By *Steve Haynes*
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Health care workers seemed to be split, depending on how they look at the issue. Some testified that reporting would keep kids from seeking medical and professional advice that might save them from pregnancy, disease or worse.

Others said they already report underage sex as child abuse.

Welfare workers said they rarely investigate reports of sex between consenting underage children, and there seems to be a lot of it, more than most parents would like to admit.

There seems to be no "right" answer here. From a technical standpoint, Kline probably is right. If it's illegal for a child to have sex, then inducing that child to violate the law most logically is a form of child abuse.

From a practical standpoint, though, it's silly to assume that teenagers are not going to experiment with sex. Most parents have a hard enough time dealing with these things within a family, let alone with a welfare worker.

And if a child can't go home for help or advice, is it a good idea to tell health professionals they have to report that patient to the state when he or she comes looking for help?

Kline is a conservative Republican, but he comes from the branch of his party that abhors big-brother government only when they disagree with it. A major intrusion into the family such as this is OK, apparently, when it involves teen-age morals.

We'd like to think that our 15-year-olds are innocent, but experience shows us that is not always the case.

But do we really want the state sticking its nose that far into our kids' lives?

It's not a pretty mess Mr. Kline has stirred up here, that's for sure.

From the Bible

Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him, fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. Ps. 37: 7-9

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