

Business Briefs

Medicine

Malpractice rates hit obstetricians hard

Skyrocketing malpractice insurance rates and the fear of being sued are forcing large numbers of doctors to give up delivering babies throughout the United States, according to an Institute of Medicine conference in Washington D.C. "Multiple counties or entire regions of some states report having just one or two doctors to deliver babies," said Health and Human Services Secretary Otis Bowen, during his keynote speech at the conference June 20.

According to Bowen, malpractice rates have risen more rapidly for obstetricians than for any other specialty. The average premium rose from \$11,000 in 1982 to more than \$37,000 in 1987. In Florida, the annual premium for an obstetrician was \$152,900 in 1987.

High insurance costs, and the fear of being sued, have resulted in 12% of obstetricians in the country stopping delivery of babies, while 27% now limit their practice to high-risk pregnancies most in need of a physician's care.

AIDS

Alarming increase in deaths of young women

"Alarming increases in deaths of young women from respiratory and other infections in the District of Columbia and other urban areas of high AIDS prevalence suggest many more women are dying of AIDS-related illnesses than data indicate," the *Washington Times* reported June 20, citing a report in the July issue of *Ms.* magazine.

The AIDS-related "deaths of women may be significantly undercounted because many do not survive long enough to develop or be diagnosed as having the 'full-blown' AIDS used for official case counts," wrote Ms. Chris Norwood, chairwoman of the AIDS Committee of the National Women's Health Network, who authored the *Ms.* report.

The percentage increase in flu and pneumonia deaths between 1981 and 1986 in New

York City was 154%, while in Connecticut, the increase was 133%, followed by the District of Columbia, with 125%, Maryland with 57%, and New Jersey with 38%.

"When you start to see deaths going up like that in women who are supposed to be in their healthiest years, you really have to ask what's going on," said Dr. Iris Davis, AIDS outpatient coordinator at Woodhull Hospital in Brooklyn, N.Y. "There's so much [AIDS] associated disease we're not monitoring."

Precious Metals

Gold price rises despite supply rise

Despite a remarkable increase of supplies on world markets, the price of gold has remained remarkably stable and steadily increased. This is the conclusion of a feature analysis in the June 20 *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*.

The newspaper stresses that the gold price has moved upward despite the fact that free world gold production has increased more than 43% since 1980, from 959 to 1,373 tons in 1987, including a North American increase from 129 to 275 tons.

The Swiss financial daily points out that despite this and unprecedented "gold loan" sales of bank gold onto markets, prices have increased steadily, aided by significant buying from Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

The obvious inference is that governments as well as private investors are willing to pay whatever the market is asking for the precious metal, as a hedge against volatile financial markets.

East Bloc

U.S.S.R. rife with poverty, drug-addiction

More than half of the Soviet Union's population lives below the poverty line, the Soviet newspaper *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya* reported June 1. The paper cited retired people, young couples with children, families in which fathers earn little money, and

single mothers as the most common victims of poverty.

At the same time, "drug addiction has skyrocketed," reports *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. According to figures given by Soviet Health Minister Chazov in an interview with the Communist youth daily, 22% of all students in professional schools and 15% of all university students have used drugs.

Dope, Inc.

Marijuana crop up, arrests way down

Marijuana grown in the United States in 1987 was worth \$33.1 billion, according to the newsletter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML). This represents a 50% increase over the government estimate for 1986.

NORML released the figures at its 18th annual conference, whose featured speaker was Ron Paul, a former congressman now running for President on the Libertarian ticket.

The states harvesting the greatest quantity of marijuana are Arkansas, California, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, and Washington, with over \$1 billion each.

By comparison, the total receipts of the farm sector, encompassing every other crop produced, were \$142 billion in 1983, and have not changed much since.

In short, marijuana is by far the single largest cash crop in the country, and is the most important cash crop in quite a number of states.

At the same time, marijuana arrests in the United States are at their lowest level since the drug was declared illegal 50 years ago, falling by 20% from 1986 to 1987.

Foreign Aid

Industrial nations cut Third World programs

Every industrialized nation except Japan has cut their aid programs to Third World coun-