

Letter To The Editor

Are amounts spent to prevent risk worth the money?

Editor, *The Petersburg Monitor*:

A July 15 *Wall Street Journal* editorial by David Stipp titled *Prevention May be Costlier than a Cure*.

He enumerated the median cost of a year of life saved by various interventions:

Childhood immunizations and prenatal care save money.

On the other hand we spend \$600 on flu shots to prolong one life by one year.

Construction safety rules cost \$38,000 per year of life saved. It is interesting to note that dozens of OSHA inspectors were killed on the building sites which they were supposed to supervise.

We spend \$141,000 on home radon control to save a year's life.

Even more interesting are the \$1.9 million we spend on asbestos abating to probably save a life. We do not count the deaths by fire or smoke inhalation caused by the absence of asbestos. We are still wasting billions of dollars in the vain hope of saving lives.

The last two of the above mentioned expenditures show how ridiculously we spend money to overcome the imaginary fears of becoming a victim from an extremely remote hazard.

This is caused by the scientific illiteracy of reporters and especially E.P.A. decision makers.

It would be an easy way to reduce inflation and the budget deficit, if all researchers who publish new findings about health risks would also have to submit costs versus benefits calculations.

They should also have to justify their claims of danger with logical explanations.

The latter was completely missing when some wise academicians in the health care field came to the conclusion that popcorn fried in coconut fat shortens our lives.

Those fear mongers will tell us hundreds of health hazards which we should avoid.

They fail to mention that far more people die or become crippled in automobile accidents resulting

from driving far above the legal speed limit, than from all the above health risks.

We also wonder why our health care costs have risen so drastically in the last decades.

When I recently went for my semi-annual dental check-up, I asked my dentist why his fee had gone up \$8.

He told me that this covers the cost of everything disposable which he has to use to prevent another HIV infection like the one which cost the life of Kimberly Bergalis.

She was infected by her dentist who did not inform his patients that he had AIDS from which he died shortly afterwards.

Some people suspect that Dr. Acer was either mad or vengeful when he infected several of his patients.

Normal dental procedures never before resulted in an infection.

Now even the rubber tooth brush has to be discarded after each patient.

This makes as much sense as the throwing away of most medical instruments after they were used once.

Before the enactment of those E.P.A. rules we did not die when we were injected with a sterilized needle.

Our lives were more enjoyable when we had the money in our pockets which we now have to spend on ever increasing health insurance premiums.

Worst of all are the toxic emissions from the incinerators where those discards are burned.

They may be a bigger health hazard than the risk of getting infected by reused sterilized needles.

A cost study of the unnecessary throwing away of medical and dental instruments, gloves etc. would show that we spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to prolong one life one year.

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