



The Last Word

□ We've all heard of the quest for artificial intelligence through computers, but are you aware of the latest breakthroughs in the field of artificial stupidity? The May issue of *Omni* reports the progress of computer scientist Arthur Boran of the University of New Mexico in his search for artificial dumbness. He has formed the National Artificial Stupidity Association, and his goal is formidable. Boran and his colleagues are trying to design a program "that can accurately simulate the full variety of human stupidities." According to the report, the group is off to a good start. One of their programs is dubbed IDMBH, which stands for "I did my best, honest." Thus far, this program has failed to solve the simplest problem, all the while generating creative excuses from "the dog erased it," to "I didn't know you wanted it today." Sound familiar? Another of Boran's breakthroughs involved a program which, despite its extensive data bank, cannot respond to a request in any sort of organized fashion. When asked where the next earthquake might occur, this program is liable to spew out several hundred inane suggestions such as "The Bronx zoo? . . . The Rose Bowl? . . . The Nabisco factory? . . ."

Yet another program tries incessantly to justify its ludicrous answers with more fictitious "facts" and "evidence." A programmer challenged the computer's claim that the city of Tijuana is militarily superior to the United States. Defending its claim, the computer responded with reports of troops gathering at the Mexican border armed with cheap pottery.

□ Speaking of advances in simulating human

behavior, isn't technology wonderful? A Stanford professor who is developing patient care robots thinks so.

Medical World News reported the development of a robotic arm that is able to respond to voice commands and do simple things such as fetching a glass of water or playing a board game. Right now the robot is bolted to a table, but a mobile version is to be built soon. Although its founder said he didn't want to depersonalize nursing homes, the report says a robot could eventually relieve nurses of routine forms of patient care like bathing, feeding, and transferring patients. While it's true the robot would not come to work grumpy from an argument with its spouse, it also wouldn't share the tears and joys of everyday life.

□ It seems the PRN concept is alive and well and spreading to other health care professionals in some sections of the country. PRN, which in this context stands for Physician's Relief Network, finds temporary positions for primary care physicians and general surgeons who are willing to substitute for their vacationing colleagues or moonlight at freestanding urgent care centers. The participating physician doesn't need to worry about operating costs, patient load, billing, or other routines of private practice. The one major drawback, however, seems to be the lack of time to form strong doctor-patient relationships. As the PRN founder said in a recent *Medical World News*, "It's like spending all of one's evenings in singles' bars: lots of one-night stands, but not much chance of a real romance."