cision makers will benefit from learning about the potential of this specialty and its future role in clinical medicine and biology.

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THE IG NOBEL PRIZES: THE ANNALS OF IMPOBABLE RESEARCH


Apart from the money, is the Nobel Prize worthwhile? Dr. Raymond Damadian, who claims to have discovered magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), seems to think so, because he went public with an expensive campaign of full-page advertisements in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and other dailies to protest his exclusion from the 2003 ceremony in Stockholm, Sweden, during which two other men received the prize for their work on MRI. We’ll have to wait for the full story because the Nobel Committee seals its deliberations for 50 years.

The secretive Swedish committee is the very opposite of the Ig Nobel Board of Governors, a wide-open bunch comprising the editors of the Annals of Improbable Research, various journalists and scientists, and, for balance, “some passerby from the street.” In contrast to the Nobel Prize, the Ig Nobel Prize is not monetary — indeed, winners must pay their own way to the annual ceremony in the Sanders Theatre of Harvard University — but it does come with other benefits. One is the privilege of hearing the Heisenberg Certainty Lecture, which is limited to 30 seconds. Another is participation in events like the auction of plaster casts of the left feet of Nobel laureates. One Ig Nobel award ceremony featured a 60-second wedding before 1200 guests. The bride’s mother commented, “This wasn’t exactly what I would have planned for my daughter... but it was even better.” I’m not making any of this up.

What about the awards? The Ig Nobel Prizes is a collection of 48 citations spanning 12 years (1991 through 2002), with annotations by Marc Abrahams, editor of the Annals of Improbable Research, and, when possible, comments of the awardees. I’ll mention here mainly prizes for work in medicine, but before I get to them, it’s worth pointing to the Ig Nobel Prize in Economics, awarded to executives of Enron, Tyco, Merrill Lynch, and other similar companies for giving new life to the subject of imaginary numbers. Jacques Chirac, president of France, was awarded the Ig Nobel Peace Prize for “commemorating the 50th anniversary of Hiroshima with atomic bomb tests in the Pacific.” And the British Standards Institution received the Prize in Literature for BS 6008, six pages of instructions for making a cup of tea.

Among my favorites for notable advances in medicine: to Chittaranjan Andrade and B.S. Srilahari for their discovery that nose picking is common among adolescents; to Carl Charnetski and colleagues for showing that elevator music prevents the common cold; to a group of Dutch physicians for their peek into coitus using MRI (a thin couple were squeezed into the machine and instructed to copulate); and to Peter Barss for demonstrating that people who stand beneath palm trees risk head injury from falling coconuts. A few others, not in medicine, but with clinical relevance: the physics prize to Deepak Chopra for quantum healing and the statistics prize to Bain and Siminoski for disproving the widely held belief that penile length correlates with height and foot size. And best for last: the 1993 Ig Nobel Prize in Literature to Eric Topol and his colleagues for publishing a paper in the New England Journal of Medicine with 976 coauthors. This group of cardiologists, who quite appropriately call themselves the GUSTO investigators, could not attend the ceremony. The prize was received on their behalf by Dr. Marcia Angell, then the executive editor of the Journal, who in her gracious acceptance speech wryly noted, “This is all a part of our continuous author-enhancement campaign.”

If you think that any of the foregoing is fake, look it up. I checked about 20 randomly selected awards (the descriptions of the prize work bear citations) and verified that the articles in question were actually published or, in the case of patents for inventions, that they were indeed granted by the U.S. Patent Office. Some of the journals that published these articles — the British Medical Journal and the New England Journal of Medicine, for example — are, some believe, otherwise upstanding. And yes, there is a patent for “protective underwear with malodorous flatus filter,” meant to protect against flatus released by your close ones. It’s all real — or surreal.
PALLIATIVE CARE LEADERSHIP CENTERS
The six centers are funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to provide free site visits, training, and technical assistance to hospitals seeking to develop and strengthen their own palliative care programs. Site visits began on Feb. 1.
- Contact Center to Advance Palliative Care, 1255 Fifth Ave., Suite C2, New York, NY 10029; or call (212) 201-2675; or see http://www.capc.org; or e-mail mailto:pdc@nysm.edu.

UPDATE IN BASIC SCIENCE FOR THE PRACTICING NEPHROLOGIST
The course will be offered in Scottsdale, Ariz., May 7 and 8. It is sponsored by the Mayo Clinic.
- Contact Michelle Girard, CME Department, Mayo Clinic Scottsdale, 13400 E. Shea Blvd., Scottsdale, AZ 85259; or call (480) 301-4580.

ANESTHESIA HISTORY ASSOCIATION 11TH ANNUAL SPRING MEETING
The conference will be held in Chicago, May 7 and 8.
- Contact A.J. Wright, Department of Anesthesiology Library, University of Alabama School of Medicine, 619 19th St. S., F965, Birmingham, AL 35294-6810; or call (205) 975-0159; or fax (205) 975-5962; or e-mail ajwright@uab.edu; or see http://www.anes.uab.edu/anesthist/aha2004.htm.

THE WASHINGTON MANUAL COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF INTERNAL MEDICINE AND BOARD PREPARATION COURSE
The course will be offered in St. Louis, May 19–23.
- Contact Washington University School of Medicine, CME, Campus Box 8063, 660 S. Euclid Ave., St. Louis, MO 63110; or call (800) 325-9862; or fax (314) 362-1087; or see http://cme.wustl.edu.

IM EDEX
The following courses will be held:
- “The 6th International Conference: Perspectives in Colorectal Cancer (IPCC)” (Barcelona, Spain, June 17–19) and “The 9th International Conference on Geriatric Oncology: Cancer in the Elderly: The 5th Meeting of SIGO” (San Francisco, Oct. 15 and 16).
- Contact Heather Drew, Imedex, 70 Technology Dr., Alpharetta, GA 30005; or call (770) 751-7332; or fax (770) 751-7334; or e-mail h.drew@imedex.com; or see http://www. imedex.com.

AMERICAN BOARD OF PSYCHIATRY AND NEUROLOGY EXAMINATION SCHEDULE
The following examinations will be given in Deerfield, Ill., unless otherwise indicated:
- Oral (New Orleans, June 18–20; Dallas, Sept. 10–12); Written (Nov. 3); Subspecialty (Addiction Psychiatry, April 13; Geriatric Psychiatry, April 15; Pain Medicine, Sept. 18); Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (Houston, Nov. 12–14); Re-certification (Addiction Psychiatry, April 27; Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, May 18; Forensic Psychiatry, May 25; Psychiatry, Aug. 3 and 4; Neurology, Aug. 10 and 11; Child Neurology, Aug. 19; Clinical Neurophysiology, Aug. 26).
- Contact American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, 500 Lake Cook Rd., Suite 335, Deerfield, IL 60015-5249; or call (847) 945-7900; or fax (847) 945-1146.

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
The following courses will be offered in Toronto: “Update in General Surgery” (April 15–17); “Paediatric Update 2004” (April 21–24); “Toronto Breast Surgery Symposium” (April 29); “Symposium on Aesthetic Plastic Surgery” (April 30 and May 1); “University of Toronto International Interdisciplinary Wound Care Course” (May 14–17); “CME Congress 2004” (May 15–18); “Thoracic Surgery” (May 28 and 29); and “13th International Vascular Biology Meeting” (June 1–5).
- Contact Continuing Education, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto, 500 University Ave., Suite 650, Toronto, ON M5G 1V7, Canada; or call (416) 978-2719; or see http://cme.utoronto.ca; or e-mail ce.med@utoronto.ca.