



The New Year in a Nutshell



By John Ostrich, MD

IT HAS BEEN A FEW YEARS SINCE we here at SSVMS have been able to obtain — or afford — the services of the renowned British clairvoyant Dame Elspeth Mallory-Weiss. She has once again agreed to honor us with her predictions for the coming year, with special emphasis on medical matters. Her predictive accuracy has been astonishing, and a leading British newspaper once called her "the closest thing to

Nostradamus since, well, Nostradamus."

She is able, from her home in Cornwall, to soothsay concerning a vast variety of events in all lands and among all peoples. We asked her to prophesy what will happen in California in 2003, especially as it may affect our profession. Busy as she is, she acquiesced due to her special relationship with our Executive Director, Bill Sandberg, and also a handsome stipend from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Here are her predictions, translated from her crabbed and idiosyncratic hand-written notes, and made as readable as possible by our crack editorial staff.

January

Governor Gray Davis' inaugural barbecue party is a great success and incidentally adds a nice bit of money to his Presidential campaign fund, as he is able to extract donations from Ball Park franks, French's mustard and Wonder Bread, the main sponsors of the event. At the end of the party, the ebullient Governor announces he will donate those same donations to the state general fund to help defray the state budget deficit, which will therefore now be only \$25.3 billion.

February

AB 3802 is introduced which would require all licensed physicians in the state to be functionally bilingual in English and Spanish, and to pass a standard state-generated test every two years to keep their licenses. License fees for physicians rise to \$2000 every two years to help pay for the testing, but there is a \$500 discount if the physician can prove fluency as well in Vietnamese, Korean, Chinese, Tagalog or Pennsylvania Dutch.... Jennifer Lopez leaves Ben Affleck and runs off to Argentina with rapper Eminem. "This time," she tells a reporter, "it's for real."

March

The Los Angeles Lakers finally win their 25th game, and Shaquille O'Neal demands to be traded or he says he will hold his breath until he turns blue. Proposition 78, which would move the state capital to Los Angeles, qualifies for the November ballot. It is strongly backed (some say even authored by) Governor Davis, who tells a news reporter in an unusually candid interview that "it will save the people of California a lot of money because they won't have to pay for me to go back and forth from Sacratomato to Tinseltown any more."

April

U.N. weapons inspectors continue to uncover incredible finds at Saddam's palaces. In fact, it is so much fun rooting around in the palaces that they no longer even go to chemical factories or baby food processing plants. At one palace, they uncover a stash of several

hundred thousand York peppermint patties in a huge refrigerated room. At another, they discover a larger-than-life oil portrait of Saddam dressed like the lad in Gainsborough's "Blue Boy" (same color, too) complete with mullet hair-do. "Incroyable," sputters one French inspector. "Formidable," intones another. "Sacre bleu," says another as he munches on a peppermint patty.

May

AB 5942 is introduced which would mandate that every California physician attend at least 10 hours of CME every four years specifically devoted to geriatric toenail diseases. The bill is prompted by a notorious case in Los Angeles, where an out of work neurosurgeon passed himself off as a podiatrist and cruised through dozens of extended care facilities armed with toenail clippers and emery boards, making a mess of many senior citizens' toenails and illegally billing Medicare for podiatric services.... Jennifer Lopez is seen leaving Mezzaluna restaurant in L.A. arm-in-arm with Presidential hopeful John Kerry.

June

The Dow Jones Industrial Average tops 10,000 and so does the record number of Assembly bills generated in Sacramento. Governor Davis says he is "as proud as I can be of the hard working women and men of the Assembly" as he speaks to a gathering of Indian casino managers and announces that Texas Hold 'em is now the official State Card Game.... Because of the crush of legislation, most Assembly and Senate members and staffers stay in the Capitol 24/7. Local health authorities are concerned because of the strain placed on personal hygiene facilities in the building. One of the new bills, AB 9854, would direct all physicians to post, in every waiting and exam room, movie-poster size state-approved warnings about the dangers of consuming so-called fast food. Governor Davis declares that, if he ever again has the opportunity to host another inaugural barbecue-style party ("like, say, in Washington, D.C.") he promises to "think outside the bun" when it comes to choosing what food to serve at the affair.

July

State health officials are concerned that hundreds of vagrants are ill from gasoline ingestion. They blame the epidemic on the highly publicized switch from MTBE to ethanol as the official state gasoline oxygenator additive. One man, recovering at Los Angeles County Hospital tells a reporter, "Hey, all I heard was that it had alcohol in it, and at a buck fifty a gallon, it's a lot cheaper than Nyquil or Thunderbird."

August

Barry Bonds hits his 84th home run but the Giants remain in the cellar of the National League west. Bonds is so frustrated by his teammates' lackluster play that he vows to hold his breath till he turns blue unless things improve....In Iraq, chief weapons inspector Hans Blix declares he has seen no evidence that Saddam Hussein's military is hiding any devices or any designs to create weapons of mass destruction. Soon thereafter, Matt Drudge reports on successful Russian efforts in the 1970's to extract a potent nerve gas from peppermint patties. The State Assembly responds quickly with AB 10860 which passes without a single nay and is signed promptly by the Governor. It bans sales of all products containing peppermint extract.

September

The California Senate and Assembly continue to argue over a new state budget. Governor Davis says he will not sign the new budget until multivitamin pills and enteric coated aspirin are reinstated in the Medi-Cal formulary. Proponents of the deletion respond that "all you have to do is eat your vegetables to get enough vitamins, and plain old uncoated aspirin is just fine." Plus, they say, "It will save the state \$235,000, and every little bit helps."

October

Barry Bonds is admitted to the Betty Ford Center in Palm Desert due to "exhaustion and chronic self-induced hypoxia" according to Dr. Jacques Ivresse, the medical director of

the clinic. "A most unusual case," Dr. Ivresse opines. Governor Davis signs the state budget. Since Medi-Cal providers have not been paid for over three months, several hundred physicians leave the state and settle elsewhere, most in the midwest. The president of the North Dakota Medical Association writes a thank-you letter to Governor Davis. Trader Joe's opens a big new store in Fargo.

November

The World Champion Sacramento Kings start the season with 12 straight losses despite the presence of their new big man in the middle, Shaquille O'Neal, who has been slowed by chronic foot pain. Chris Webber and Vlade Divac, now both in Lakers' uniforms, are "happy to be in L.A." according to ESPN. Same goes for Tyra Banks....In Iraq, weapons inspectors find a massive underground warehouse under one of Saddam's palaces filled with American sports memorabilia and old golf clubs. "There must be a hundred Mickey Mantle rookie cards in there!" exclaims Hans Blix.

December

A new Assembly bill would require all pediatric physicians or any doctor who treats small people under the age of 10 to "dress like clowns or similar jovial characters" in order to "lessen the apprehension that naturally arises when a child is placed in a clinic or hospital setting." The same bill would also make it a misdemeanor for any physician to wear "so-called lab coats and/or surgical scrub outfits" while in public hospital areas or in clinic settings because "doing so only reinforces the authoritarian aspect of the doctor-patient relationship and makes many patients and their caregivers anxious." Patch Adams addresses the Assembly Health Committee in support of this bill....John Kerry withdraws from his Presidential campaign to spend more time with Jennifer Lopez. Governor Davis finally announces that he will seek his party's nomination for the Presidency. As does Tiger Woods.

Happy New Year.

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