

As I View It From Washington

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CIGARETTE SMOKING AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE IS A LIVELY TOPIC for discussion around Washington these days. A number of Bills were introduced in Congress for the purpose of curtailing smoking in one way or another as a health measure. Bills in the House are aimed primarily at smoking control by placing a stiff excise tax on nicotine and tar content. Senate Bills would prohibit smoking in Federal buildings and in "public places." The big question is whether any of the Bills is going anywhere or whether they will just turn out to be so many smokedreams. As long as Uncle Sam supports tobacco farmers through Federal subsidies and many states depend on tax revenue from tobacco products, it is unlikely that anything other than local ordinances will be passed.

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MEDICAL DEVICE REGULATIONS WILL BE ISSUED IN PIECEMEAL FASHION, very likely at six months intervals. Although the Medical Devices Amendments Act was passed during the 94th Congress, true to form, the implementing "Regs" have not yet been issued. The Bureau of Medical Devices of the Food and Drug Administration is in the process of soliciting comments from the public on the proposed Rules and Regulations. The new law, P.L. 94-295, classifies medical devices into various categories and subjects them to review by special panels for each category. We'll have more on this important subject as additional information becomes available.

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BLOOD FROM PAID DONORS WILL NO LONGER HAVE TO BE LABELLED to state that it carries a higher risk of hepatitis than blood from volunteer donors. According to the FDA, the lack of labelling in no way will affect the supply of blood. FDA says that most blood recipients already are well aware of the fact that paid donor blood carries a higher risk of hepatitis. The FDA says that the proposed requirement that blood be labelled only as coming from a paid donor or from a volunteer donor is sufficient.

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MEDICARE AND MEDICAID PATIENTS WILL BE NO BETTER OFF under the recent reorganization of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare ordered by HEW Secretary Califano. Creation of a new Health Care Financing Administration, which will control both Medicare and Medicaid, is referred to by some as "just moving the furniture around." The primary reason for the new alignment is an effort to control what the Carter Administration and others refer to as "widespread fraud and abuse in both the Medicare and the Medicaid programs." Secondary reason is to try to save the Federal Government and the taxpayer "literally thousands of dollars," in the Secretary's words. White House Press Secretary Jody Powell called Califano's move "a superb example of President Carter's drive for improved governmental efficiency." Some HEW staffers, however, are less than overjoyed by what they see as "another reorganization" in a Department which has had more

than its share of reorganizations. In any case, it is unlikely that Medicare or Medicaid patients will suffer in the reorganization process, except for those who may have been receiving benefits fraudulently.

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