I strongly disagree with Dr Smith, the deputy director of Metro Rescue in the Western Cape, when he says that training paramedics in regional anaesthesia may be compared to training them to administer morphine and midazolam and 'wouldn't be too much of a step up'. That is an ill-informed and dangerous belief. Even medical rescue generalist doctors, I believe, are unsuitable persons to train to attempt occasional major nerve blocks on the mountainside.

Dr Decker's suggestion of rather training anaesthesiologists who already have regional anaesthesia skills to be part of the rescue team is the logical approach. Unfortunately medical schools will also need to expand on the regional anaesthesia teaching programme for anaesthesiologists. Skill in performance of major nerve blocks is not a requirement to graduate as an anaesthesiologist, and few graduate anaesthesiologists are skilled in various limb nerve blocks, if any at all.

I wish this initiative every success, and must repeat that performing major nerve blocks is definitely not for paramedics.

R M Raw

73 Valerie Avenue
Northcliff
Johannesburg

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Overproduction of food as the ultimate cause of obesity in the developed world

To the Editor: The timely editorial by Du Toit and Van der Merwe[1] on the epidemic of childhood obesity raises some interesting questions. Is it true, for example, that 'approximately half of the world's adult population [is] affected by either overweight or obesity'? How is this statistic derived? For this seems at variance with the concept that poverty and malnutrition affect a majority of the earth's population. I suspect that many of the readers of this journal might be under the impression that obesity, at least in the developed world, is associated with increasing affluence, impelled perhaps by the emotional stress of not quite making it in those societies that promote material wealth as the defining value.[2] The authors correctly stress the important aetiological role of dramatically decreasing levels of habitual physical activity and physical fitness levels of succeeding generations of young South Africans.

The authors also address the issue of marketing which, if recent experience with the commercialisation of sports drinks is correct,[3] may be the greater problem. But perhaps the ultimate cause of obesity is not marketing but rather the overproduction of food in developed nations. Marketing is perhaps just the symptom rather than the cause of the overproduction-driven, marketing-hyped overconsumption. The economic reality is that if there is not an overproduction of food by the food companies, and if that food is not sold and eaten, there cannot be progressively rising profit as required by modern economic realities (as in my fiscal ignorance I understand them). Hence the need to drive humans chronically to eat beyond satiety in those countries where there is an overproduction of food.

Indeed the growing enslavement of the US population to overeating[4] is somewhat analogous to their commercially driven enslavement to over-drinking, especially during exercise,[3] based on the unproven and highly improbable dogma that thirst is an inadequate guide to what the real fluid requirements are during exercise. Hence athletes must be encouraged to drink 'as much as is tolerable' during exercise. As a consequence, there have been a number of self-induced deaths from over-drinking during exercise in US military pesonnel and female marathon runners/walkers. The effects of the over-marketing of the food surpluses generated in the developed world are of course far more widespread and dire, but the underlying economic principles appear to be the same.

The introduction of attempts to regulate the tobacco industry makes one wonder whether similar restrictive controls will ever be introduced to limit the overproduction of food in order to arrest the growing epidemic of obesity and diabetes in developed countries. Political and economic realities suggest that this is highly unlikely, at least in the USA.[4,5] Indeed my understanding, hopefully incorrect, is that the effects of the antitobacco legislation in the USA have, paradoxically or perhaps by political design, had relatively little effect on tobacco production and hence on the tobacco farmers in that country.

T D Noakes

MRC/UCT Research Unit for Exercise Science and Sports Medicine
Department of Human Biology
University of Cape Town

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On being politically correct

To the Editor: Political correctness seems to have become a new overarching value in our society, and one that limits honest dialogue even in medicine. Every health worker will acknowledge that being politically correct is a foolish position to hold when political correctness flies in the face of the

evidence. Yet, when one looks around at current dialogue in this nation, political correctness seems to keep many silent who should be speaking.

In the abortion debate, it is politically correct to say that abortion is good for women, that it upholds their rights over their own bodies. It is politically correct to say that fetuses have no rights, although their humanity is beyond question. It is politically correct to suppress all but the most muted allusions to post-abortion syndrome — the pain and guilt couples feel after having destroyed their own babies. It is politically correct to turn a blind eye to the dead place in the hearts of these people, and in the hearts of health workers who do the abortions, to the broken relationships destroyed by subverted grief, to the doubled or trebled suicide rates in women who choose abortion during the first 5 years after the procedure, to the fact that a final assessment of the emotional effects of abortion in women cannot be made less than 20 years after the event, so great is the power of denial.

But we are entering an area with still wider implications. Now it is politically correct to maintain that same-sex marriage and the rearing of children by same-sex couples is OK. That value is held in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

- In more than 5 000 years of human history, the marriage of one man to one woman has been held as the best basis for the nurturing and socialisation of children, and every social experiment (including Vladimir Lenin's experiment in 1918) to try other bases has led to disaster. Thus all societies have provided legal protection of heterosexual marriage as the best way to ensure the future well-being of their children.
- Sociological evidence from countries that have tried legalising same-sex marriage suggests that homosexual men have difficulty maintaining a stable relationship for more than 1.5 years and that these men have on average eight sexual partners outside their primary relationship per year. Such lack of stability carries no safe nurturing potential.
- Natural law, anatomy and physiology all combine to underline the complementarity of male and female sexuality and psychology. The same cannot be said of same-sex relationships.
- Epidemiological studies almost without exception confirm the huge disease burden of an active homosexual lifestyle. Wide acceptance of such a lifestyle would only be encouraged by our legalisation of gay marriage.
- The agenda of gay organisations is 'the repeal of legislative provisions that restrict the sex or number of persons entering into a marriage unit; and the extension of legal benefits to all persons who cohabit regardless of sex or numbers.'[1] In other words, their agenda is sexual and nurtures chaos without regard to the epidemics of STDs, psychopathology and violence which will certainly follow.

We are being asked to agree to a social experiment of huge proportions with massive negative implications for the well-being of our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. It is a social experiment that makes the introduction of bottle-feeding in the 1950s - 70s look infinitely tame. And it is not useful to say that many already live in this sort of chaos — society needs visions of good, effective and safe norms built into its legal frameworks. Without them, we perish.

But that brings me to my point. As the medical profession, we have information from psychiatry, developmental psychology, venereology and family medicine that should make us far more united against the propagation of the gay agenda for family life than we ever were against bottle-feeding. We should be saying boldly to our more 'progressive' legal colleagues: 'Stop. This is the wrong road.' And we are likely to be heard because we can speak with some authority. This is not a rejection of homosexual people — just of their radical agenda.

Why do we not do so? Are we confused by post-modernism with its entropy of values, too lethargic to think things through for the well-being of our children, or just plain cowed by political correctness?

J V Larsen

Eshowe Hospital,
Eshowe, KwaZulu-Natal

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