LETTERS

Viewing Mammograms Defensively

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommendations identified a problem with screening mammograms: the high cost and frequency of expensive follow-up testing ("Experts Divided on Mammography Guidelines," FAMILY PRACTICE NEWS, December 2009, p. 6). But the panel failed to identify the reason for this, and recommended throwing out the baby with the bath water.

There is nothing wrong with the previous manner in which mammograms were recommended. What drove up costs were the defensive medical practices required in interpreting mammograms. The task force should have recommended malpractice reform that would eliminate the need for such defensive practices. Most of the objectionable expense would then disappear, and women could continue having the appropriate screening mammograms performed at the appropriate age and frequency.

Patrick J. Naples, M.D.
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Another Late Bloomer

The story about Dr. James Barron ("The Rest of Your Life: An Ironman Competes to Give Back," FAMILY PRACTICE NEWS, Nov. 15, 2009, p. 68) inspired me to share some of my personal experience.

I was raised in the former USSR, a country with strict behavioral norms. When I was young, I wanted to learn karate, but martial arts were not considered feminine. I pursued my dreams, became a physician, learned other languages, and moved to the United States to practice medicine.

Recently, my toddler son was diagnosed with an unusual genetic form of diabetes, the progression of which can be greatly delayed by diet and exercise. I want to be a role model for him, so I signed up for karate school. I received my first belt 2 weeks ago.

I'm running a half-marathon this weekend—something I never thought I would do, especially since I had hip surgery not even a year ago and was unable to walk a mile a few months ago. As my dad always says, good often comes out of bad. The need to encourage my son made me pursue my childhood dreams. I'm far from my dream of having a black belt, but I think of it "one belt at a time."

Julia Adamian, M.D.
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It's Time for Recognition

The article on Dr. Stanford T. Shulman and his extensive collection of postage stamps with medical themes ("The Rest of Your Life: Once a Collector, Always a Collector," December, 2009, p. 94) called to mind another notable philatelist, Dr. James Lutschg, of Baton Rouge, La., who has amassed more than 130 antitobacco stamps from 55 countries.

To observe the 1980 World Health Day theme of "Smoking or Health—The Choice is Yours," 24 countries issued an antitobacco postage stamp. Thirty other nations have since issued such stamps, but the United States is not one of them.

Dr. Lutsch recently donated his antitobacco stamp and philatelic cover collection to the University of Alabama Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society. He and the center hope that physicians will write to the U.S. Postal Service and to Congress to ask that in 2014 it commemorate the 50th anniversary of the publication of the landmark Surgeon General's report by issuing the nation's first antismoking postage stamp.

Dr. Alan Blum is director of the Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society in Tuscaloosa, Ala.