

Polio Perspective

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THE "SCREW"TER STORE. DON'T HOVEROUND!

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THE "SCREW"TER STORE. DON'T HOVEROUND!

Feds raid "The Scooter Store," all but 300 employees fired!
Will polio survivors now get power wheelchairs that they really NEED?

SCOOTER, WHEELCHAIR ADS AIMED AT SENIORS BLASTED
The Associated Press 3/29/13

WASHINGTON — TV ads show smiling seniors enjoying an "active" lifestyle on a motorized scooter, taking in the sights at the Grand Canyon, fishing on a pier and high-fiving their grandchildren at a baseball game. The commercials, which promise freedom and independence to people with limited mobility, have driven the nearly \$1 billion U.S. market for power wheelchairs and scooters. But the spots by the industry's two leading companies, The Scooter Store and Hoveround, also have drawn scrutiny from critics who say they convince some seniors that they need a scooter to get around when many don't. Members of Congress say the ads lead to hundreds of millions of dollars in unnecessary spending by Medicare, which is only supposed to pay for scooters as a medical necessity when seniors are unable to use a cane, walker or regular wheelchair. Government inspectors say up to 80 PERCENT OF THE SCOOTERS AND POWER WHEELCHAIRS MEDICARE BUYS GO TO PEOPLE WHO DON'T MEET THE REQUIREMENTS.

The scooter controversy, which has escalated with a raid by federal authorities on The Scooter's Store's New Braunfels, Texas, headquarters last month, underscores the influence TV ads can have on medical decisions. But critics argue that the scooter spots are little more than sales pitches that cause patients to pressure doctors to prescribe unnecessary equipment.

THE SCOOTER STORE AND HOVEROUND, BOTH PRIVATELY HELD COMPANIES THAT TOGETHER MAKE UP ABOUT 70 PERCENT OF THE U.S. MARKET FOR SCOOTERS, SPENT MORE THAN \$180 MILLION ON TV, RADIO AND PRINT ADVERTISING IN 2011, UP 20 PERCENT FROM 2008, according to advertising tracker Kantar Media. Their ads often include language that the scooters can be paid for by Medicare or other insurance: "Nine out of ten people got them for little or no cost," states one Hoveround ad. Hoveround did not respond to a half-dozen requests for comment. THE SCOOTER STORE, THE NATION'S BIGGEST SELLER OF SCOOTERS, SAID THAT MOST PEOPLE WHO CONTACT THE COMPANY AFTER SEEING THE ADS DO NOT ULTIMATELY RECEIVE A SCOOTER. "The fact that 87 percent of the persons who seek power mobility products from The Scooter Store under their Medicare benefits are disqualified by the company's screening process is powerful evidence of the company's commitment to ensuring that only legitimate claims are submitted to Medicare," the company said in a statement.

Insurance executives say doctors who don't understand when Medicare is supposed to pay for scooters are partly to blame for unnecessary purchases. Scooters are covered by Medicare if they are prescribed by a doctor who has completed an evaluation showing that a patient is unable to function at home without a device. The doctor fills out a lengthy prescription form and sends it to a supplier that delivers the scooter to the patient and then submits the paperwork to Medicare for payment. Medicare pays about 80 percent of that cost, which can range from \$1,500 to \$3,500. The remainder is often picked up by supplemental insurance or the government-funded Medicaid program for low-income and disabled Americans.

Dr. Stephen Peake, medical director for the insurer Blue Cross Blue Shield in Tennessee, said doctors can often be uninformed about the appropriate role of scooters as patients. "I talk to a lot of physicians about this subject," Peake said in testimony before the Senate Committee on Aging last year. "They don't understand that you can't get a power mobility device so mom can go to the park with the family."

One reason for the confusion? Doctors say scooter companies are just as aggressive with health professionals as they are in marketing to their patients. Dr. Jerome Epplin of Litchfield, Ill., who also testified before the Senate, estimates that **ONLY ABOUT ONE OF EVERY 10 PATIENTS WHO ASK FOR A SCOOTER ACTUALLY NEEDS ONE**. But he said that sales representatives from some scooter companies put pressure on him by accompanying patients to his office. The effect is coercive, he says. "It can be intimidating," Epplin says. "I see it as an inappropriate attempt to influence my clinical judgment when I'm evaluating a patient."

In recent months, Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., and other members of the Senate Aging Committee have pushed Medicare to recover the millions of dollars spent on unnecessary scooters each year. Those purchases totaled about \$500 million in 2011, the latest year available, according to a report by the Department of Health and Human Services' inspector general. Medicare, which says that it does not have control over how companies market the scooters, launched a pilot program designed to reduce wasteful spending on scooters. Under the program, government contractors in seven states review patients' medical documentation to make sure they need a wheelchair or scooter before approving payments for a device. The program is being tested in a small number of states — including Florida, California and New York — because the government must pay contractors extra to review additional paperwork. The program has been criticized by The Scooter Store's executives, who say that contractors are too strict in their reviews, rejecting payments for power chairs that are genuinely needed.

The reduced payments are hurting the company, which was founded in 1991. **THE SCOOTER STORE HAS SPENT NEARLY \$1 MILLION LOBBYING CONGRESS OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS, ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY FOCUSED ON THE MEDICARE REVIEW PROGRAM.** And the company laid off

about 370 employees in the past year, blaming the reduced payments it's been getting from Medicare.

THEN, LAST WEEK, THE SCOOTER STORE NOTIFIED MOST OF ITS REMAINING 1,800 EMPLOYEES THAT THEIR JOBS WERE BEING ELIMINATED. THE COMPANY SAID IN A STATEMENT THAT IT IS OPERATING WITH A WORKFORCE OF 300 EMPLOYEES — DOWN FROM THE 2,500 WORKFORCE IT HAD AT ITS PEAK — WHILE TRYING TO RESTRUCTURE ITS OPERATIONS. THE MASS LAYOFFS FOLLOWED A RAID IN FEBRUARY BY ABOUT 150 AGENTS FROM THE FBI, THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND THE TEXAS ATTORNEY GENERAL'S MEDICAID FRAUD UNIT.

Authorities searched the company's headquarters. Federal authorities have declined to speak about the raid, but scooter industry critics in Congress praised the action. "This raid is a welcome step toward cracking down on waste and fraud in Medicare," said Blumenthal, the Connecticut senator. "I have urged action to stop abusive overpayments for such devices — costing taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars and preying on seniors with deceptive sales pitches."

Have Amigo, Can Travel!

with Amigo owner Jann Hartman

To say that Amigo owner Jann Hartman is well-traveled is an understatement! Along with her husband John, Jann has accumulated an extensive travel history, including trips to Mexico, Canada, Jamaica, Bermuda and most of Europe.

Though her travel companion John passed away six years ago and is dearly missed, Jann still enjoys adventures when she can. Jann received her first Amigo -- a used classic yellow front drive -- from a family member in the early 90's.

"Without that sweet yellow Amigo, I would not have been able to enjoy the trip of a lifetime in 2000," Jann said. On that trip, Jann and John visited 11 countries in 27 days via Eurail pass, including a trip to a post-polio conference in England before moving on to France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium and Iceland.



Jann and John at the Pantheon in Rome

"I never realized how much I was not doing before I got my Amigo. I left everyone in the dust after I got it! I don't need anything fancy, I just need a good, dependable product," Jann said.

Throughout her travels, Jann has documented her experiences -- the good, the bad and the ugly! She started a blog called "[Have scooter, will travel](#)" in 2000, and has also contributed to a website called "[Gimp on the go.](#)"

Even with all the wonderful experiences Jann has had, her travels have not been without a few bumps in the road. **Here are some tips and tricks that Jann has learned along the way to help you be prepared**, no matter where your travels may take you!

- **Be very specific when explaining your needs.** If a destination cannot meet your needs, you may need to switch rooms or arrange for additional assistance.
- **Have your equipment serviced before your trip.** Small tweaks or replacement parts may help you avoid problems down the road.
- **Adaptors are important when your "legs" run on batteries!** Using the wrong adaptor can ruin electronics -- Amigo recommends a power convertor that is rated at 200 watts minimum.
- **Carry a basic tool kit in case small repairs are needed.** Bungee cords can also come in handy!

- **Mark your mobility equipment clearly** so people do not assume it is offered by the airport or attraction -- Jann uses post-polio stickers.
- **Never travel without duct tape** -- it can fix a variety of problems!
- **Double check your Amigo when it is delivered to you by baggage claim.** "Once they brought me my base and seat, but not my battery," Jann said. It is important to double check everything and make sure you have all the necessary parts.
- **Be careful on unfamiliar terrain and drive slowly** -- many places that seem accessible at first glance may have hidden dangers.



Jann at Mount St. Helen's in Washington

Jann's number one rule is to be prepared. "It is important to prepare for the unexpected, and a travel agent can help you prepare and ensure that anywhere you go is truly accessible for you," Jann said. "But if something goes wrong, don't get upset -- when you travel there is always potential to run into problems."

Jann is hoping to sail on an Alaskan cruise for her next adventure. "I feel fortunate to live in this day and age where we have a lot of advantages available to us," Jann said. **"Without my Amigo, I wouldn't be going anywhere."**

Visit these websites for more of Jann's favorite travel resources: www.ricksteves.com, www.cruisecritic.com and www.gimponthego.com.

Rules of Engagement

By Millie Malone Lill

No, I'm not going to tell you how to get a big shiny diamond engagement ring. I am going to tell you how to win friends and influence people through your email posts, or at least how to avoid alienating the people with whom you correspond.

Rule #1. Be considerate of the feelings of others. If you wouldn't say this to someone sitting right in front of you, don't put it in your post and send it. If you feel you must send an angry post, write it, save it in your Drafts folder and look at it again the next day. You may have cooled off by then or realized you'd misunderstood.

Rule #2. Forwards...please don't. Those cute little things you get that tell you to send this to everyone you know or Jesus won't love you anymore or you will have bad luck or your hair will fall out in clumps...they are designed by spammers. You see it, you think it's cute, you hit Forward and all the addresses you put in, plus all the ones that were left on there when you got it go to spammers. Spammers think this is Christmas! What a gift! They can harvest those email addresses and send out spam or even viruses. Jesus may still love you, but your friend who has just gotten a virus may not.

Rule #3. If you get a post that makes your blood boil, listen carefully now, **DO NOT REACT TO IT!** If it angers you, it will anger the recipient of your post. Why would you do that to someone you like well enough to correspond with? Also, check with snopes.com or truthorfiction.com or any of the other fact checking sites online. And don't fall for that line at the bottom that says Checked with Snopes and it's true. Check for yourself. I've found that most of the blood boilers are false or only partly true or are political propaganda. Just because it says it has been checked does not necessarily mean it really has been. Is it hateful? If so, delete it. Save your blood pressure and that of your friends.

Rule #4. Try to use proper spelling. Most email clients have spell check. It's there for a reason. And using all caps means, in internet language, that you are shouting. Notice the caps in the above rule. Yes, I was shouting. I wanted to get your attention. But this entire article is not in caps.

Rule #5. When replying to a post, highlight the part you are responding to and then hit Reply. Only that portion of the text that you highlighted will appear in your post. If that doesn't work, then highlight the parts you don't want to include and hit Delete. That way, those of us who are still on dialup won't have to waste our precious online moments downloading all the other posts in that conversation.

Rule #6. Your delete key is your friend. If you disagree with someone on your email list, do not respond in anger. Delete the offensive post and let it go. On our polio list, some of us have very painful days and we might respond in a very negative and hurtful manner. Learn to read with your heart. These are your friends, try to remember that.

Rule #7. Bill Gates, Facebook, or the Good Fairy...none of these will pay you to forward anything. There is no way for them to track email and besides, they just wouldn't. Use your head for more than a hatrack.

Rule #8. It's fine for you to have a religion. It's fine for you to be devout. Just try to remember that not everyone in the world is a Christian, but everyone does have a right to their own beliefs. Their own. Not yours. The same way with politics. Some people are Republicans, some are Democrats,

some don't even live in the US and could not care less about our politics. If you want to debate that sort of thing or the religious thing, join a group set up for that purpose. If a person wakes up with pain at level 7 on a 1-10 scale, they don't need to be bashed over the head with your political/religious beliefs. Our group is for support and information on how to deal with our PPS.

Rule #9. While online petitions might give notice to someone as to how a lot of people feel about a certain subject, they are not legal as a written petition is. Remember, I could have fifteen or more email addresses and send my signature from each one of them.

Rule #10. Remember to nurture your sense of humor. Laughter is the best possible exercise for a polio survivor. Don't react in anger, try to see the humor in every situation. I'm not recommending that you laugh in church, but even if you did, I don't think the Almighty would hold it against you.

EATING AN ELEPHANT

by Millie Malone Lill

My closet is bulging at the seams. I look at the mess in there and get overwhelmed by all the stuff I've accumulated. When I moved here from Canada, I brought everything I owned because I wasn't sure where I'd be living. However, it all went into storage for the eight months it took me to find this apartment. Meanwhile, I replaced some (OK, a lot) of the clothing that was in the very back of the storage unit. I have gone through and donated some clothing from time to time. However, I keep replacing what I've discarded. I think it's a female thing.

Now, due to the fact that I don't walk much I have, well, sort of...shoot, I've gained weight, OK? So some of the stuff that escaped the last assault on the closet no longer fits me. I've replaced them but they are still there!

So now I need to get ruthless and donate a lot of unused used clothing. I can do that, I suppose. But the sheer enormity of the job is daunting. I can only stand for about 5 minutes before Mr. Sciatica and Mr. Bursitis come calling. Not much can be accomplished in 5 minutes, so I don't even start.

That's the wrong attitude. The voice in my head berates me for not even trying. You are familiar with that voice, I know you are. It's the polio dragon, taunting me. He's saying that I'm lazy and worthless and that asking for help is just not on the menu. "People don't want to stop their lives and do stuff for you!" So the problem continues to exist. Shoes that I've found don't work for me, but would work fine for someone else, blouses that are pretty, but don't fit me, countless pairs of pants...there they are, smirking in their assurance that they will never have to leave my comfy closet.

Which brings me to the title of this piece: Eating an Elephant. How do you eat an elephant? Simple, one small bite at a time. So tomorrow I will tackle the shoe problem. I have a box where I can toss the shoes I no longer wear. Just that, no more. Once I get the box full, I can ask someone to take it to the place that accepts donated clothing. Or, I might even be able to put that box on my lap in my wheelchair and get it to the van on my own.

The next day, I can take everything off the shelf, just one shelf mind you, and sort that out. Or I could empty one drawer. Just one. It will take a long time to get it done and an able bodied person could surely do the entire thing in one day, but I'm not able bodied and frankly, I am not very fond of Mr. Sciatica or his brother Mr. Bursitis. They are, literally, a pain in the backside.

It might take me a month to eat that elephant, but the closet has been needing a cleaning for longer than that. Eventually, I will have a clean closet with no outgrown clothing or unwearable shoes. Won't it be nice? You never know, I just might develop a taste for elephant and use this theory on a few other huge projects that are lurking around here.

Web Corner

Redlight Increases Alertness during "Post Lunch Dip"

<http://www.newswise.com/articles/view/601991/?sc=dwhn>

Scooter Store goes belly up:

http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505123_162-57579653/scooter-store-goes-belly-up/

FYI Anyone wishing to check side effects and interactions between drugs, There is a very good and free site called [Drugs.com](http://www.drugs.com) Once you register, and agree to use, it has a huge database for drugs and interactions, it will also save your drug list and each time you are prescribed a different or newer prescription, you enter it in your list, then check again for interactions. Don't depend on MD's or Pharmacies to stay on top of all your medication and interactions with each other, because they do not. There is also an interactions checker between medications and foods. Its a very useful site. (*contributed by Frank Bryant*)

As Senior Citizens the same drugs we have always taken may be considered too risky for us as we grow older. Ask your doctor and your pharmacists if they have a copy of the BEERS list of drugs that should not be prescribed for those 60 and over.

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/health/2013/04/11/176910528/seniors-in-the-south-are-more-apt-to-be-prescribed-risky-drugs> (*contributed by Micki Minner*)

Post-polio Syndrome Lecture:

<http://vimeo.com/59743337>

This is a radio interview with Lisa Zion, an actor with PPS:

<http://leaderarena.com/ablepathways-2-5/>

The day Polio began losing its grip on America:

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2013/04/the-day-polio-began-losing-its-grip-on-america.html>

Doctors use brain scan to 'see' and measure pain:

<http://www.recordonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20130410/NEWS/130419950/-1/HEALTH>

Mechanical Engineering Professor Invents Portable Mobility Assistant Device

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/03/130329124304.htm>

Navigating the Seating and Mobility World with Post Polio

<http://www.post-polio.org/edu/pphnews/PPH29-1win13p3-7.pdf>

A Little Bit of Humor

Man Of The House

A mild-mannered man was tired of being bossed around by his wife. He went to a psychiatrist to discuss the problem.

The psychiatrist said he needed to build his self-esteem and gave him a book on assertiveness. After finishing the book, the man went home, stormed into the house and walked up to his wife.

Pointing a finger in her face, he said, "From now on, I want you to know that I am the man of this house, and my word is law!

I want you to prepare me a gourmet meal tonight, and when I'm finished eating my dinner, I expect a sumptuous dessert. Then, after dinner, you're going to draw me my bath so I can relax.

And when I'm finished with my bath, guess who's going to dress me and comb my hair?"

"The funeral director," his wife answered.