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Letters

One way or another

In the discussion of cancer statistics ("Cancer stats: Gains and losses," SN: 12/13/86, p.372; Letters, SN: 2/14/87, p.99) I believe the obvious is being overlooked. The three main causes of death for the elderly are heart failure, pneumonia and cancer. Since everyone must die from something, if the death rates from two of these are reduced at a greater rate than the death rate of the third, the result will be an increase in death caused by the third. While more people may be dying of cancer, they are living longer. The cause is not the ineffectiveness of cancer treatment. The cause is that, in not dying from heart disease or infection, they have lived long enough to get cancer.

If we cured all disease, would we be

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Cover: Shown here is a computer-generated image from a model of a pair of microbursts — patterns of intense wind that have been implicated in a number of fatal airplane accidents. In a microburst, cold air descends from clouds and spreads horizontally when it hits the ground. The blue wire frame represents a contour of the air in a microburst couple; the red inside indicates what may be the most dangerous winds. (Image: Anderson/Univ. of Ill.)



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alarmed at the drastic increase of death by accident and suicide?

Gordon Couger
Frederic, Okla.

The price is right?

Is the decision to support the Superconducting Super Collider ("\$4.4B Super Collider gets go-ahead," SN: 2/7/87, p.84) an example of the Veblen effect? Recalling my college economics, a Veblen effect occurs when a consumer (the United States) buys a good (the SSC) because of its high price (the \$4.4 billion). The project is deemed more desirable because of its high price, for it is viewed as unattainable by other consumers (those nations that compete with the United States

for high-technology markets) and thereby enhances the prestige of U.S. high-energy physics research — and, implicitly, science and technology in general.

If high price increases the national desirability of a project, perhaps the proponents of other large, yet-to-be-funded research projects, such as the mapping of the human genome, should increase their budget estimates by several billion dollars.

Charles M. Macal
Darlen, Ill.

Just to keep things equitable, why don't we require the state that becomes home to the new \$4.4B Super Collider to also become home to the new national nuclear waste depository?

Jeffrey L. Carter
Denver, Colo.

MARCH 21, 1987

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