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Letters

Lollipop message

Public Citizen Health Research Group Director Sidney M. Wolfe contends that using a grape-flavored lollipop containing the narcotic fentanyl as a presurgical sedative for children is "inappropriate" ("Lollipop draws consumer group's ire," SN: 3/11/89, p.156). The article states he is concerned that use of the drug-containing lollipop is sending "the wrong message to children."

Mr. Wolfe may have received the wrong message. There are times when hypnosis is not useful for children who are about to undergo surgery, and some parents do not stay near their children in the operative area. Use of this preparation instead of injectable medication or general anesthesia for some procedures may save a child much discomfort and anxiety.

I think it rather simplistic to believe the child will associate the use of the fentanyl lollipop with drug abuse. After all, it is being

This Week

- 324 Gene-Transfer Trial Begins in Humans
- 324 A sharp, new eye scans the southern sky
- 325 Mouse study suggests a cure for influenza
- 325 Preschool self-control and pretzel logic
- 325 New treatment may reduce breast surgeries
- 326 Pluto's atmosphere: More than methane
- 326 Magma reservoir seen under ocean ridge
- 327 Squeezed hydrogen turns semi-metallic
- 327 Vitamin E fights radicals — again and again
- 327 Building up better synthetic receptors
- 330 Spider webs: Luring light may be a trap

Research Notes

- 332 Behavior
- 332 Biomedicine
- 335 Earth Sciences

Articles

- 328 A Different Dimension

Cover: Visualizing the four-dimensional analogs of cubes, spheres, doughnuts and other geometric forms is difficult enough, as seen in this intricate computer-generated picture of a half-ellipsoid. But mathematicians have discovered that four-dimensional space has extraordinary mathematical properties quite different from those of other dimensions. Following logically from mathematical notions of space and dimension, these recent abstract results are practically impossible to visualize and exceedingly difficult to understand.
(Illustration: Thomas F. Banchoff et al./Brown Univ.)



- 331 Solar Blast

Departments

- 322 Science on the Air
- 322 Books
- 323 Letters

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used in a foreign, anxiety-filled environment, associated with strangers and possibly painful procedures. It seems much more reasonable to suspect that after such an experience a child would be reluctant to use any type of lollipop for a long time.

Perhaps Mr. Wolfe might turn on his television, where children are bombarded with "the wrong message" of smoking, alcohol use and unchecked sexual ventures on a continuous basis.

Gregory L. Trowbridge
Pediatrician
Butterworth Hospital
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Too cute for words?

I'll bet you think your writers are coming up with some really cute titles, and you are right — such as "Light Relaxation," the title on the March 11 cover that is supposed to pique one's interest in an article in that week's issue.

Unfortunately, the article deals with the relaxation of tension within chemical compounds — sometimes affected by light, but not by limited muscle relaxation as the cover title implies. When one turns to the article, the cute title is "Time to Relax" — again, not at all related to the contents, and therefore misleading.

Widely distributed communications such as SCIENCE NEWS have an obligation to help readers better understand the nature of the world they live in. In titles especially, using words to clarify concepts rather than to provide conundrums helps to show how one can use words to communicate effectively.

There is a final reason to be especially careful with titles — at least with curmudgeons like me. Having limited time to scan the array of periodicals I subscribe to, I don't want to be toyed with. I get very irritated when it happens and I tend to lose interest.

Robert A. Freeman
Santa Monica, Calif.

MAY 27, 1989

323