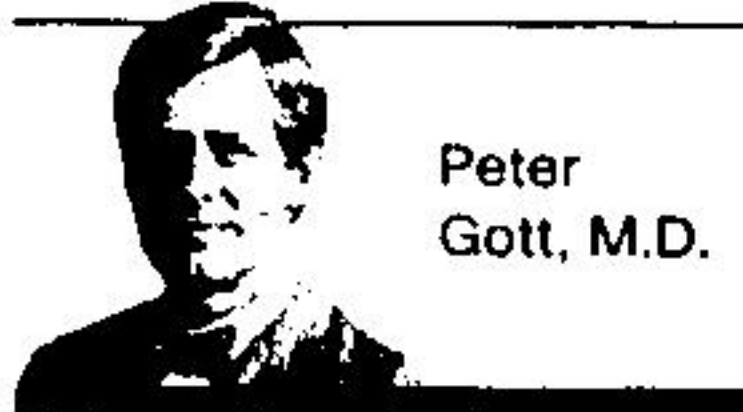


# Outlook on Lifestyle

## DR. GOTT



Peter Gott, M.D.

### 'Executive' doctors aren't any bargain

By Peter H. Gott, M.D.

At 6 o'clock Sunday morning, I admitted a middle-aged man with a heart attack to the hospital's Intensive Care Unit. This is a common occurrence; the man was the right age, he had had chest pain for three hours and his tests showed an unequivocal myocardial infarction (heart attack). In most respects, the case was straightforward.

What makes this man's sudden illness worth writing about is that he

had undergone a so-called "executive check-up" two months before. Based on the report of the examination, I believe that his heart attack was entirely preventable.

The United States is somewhat peculiar in the world today because its citizens have an almost blind reliance on medical testing as a disease-preventative. In particular, many large corporations insist that their middle-management and upper-echelon executives subject themselves to a quasi-religious ritual: the yearly examination.

I don't know who originally convinced the well-educated officers of companies that this ritual was necessary. And I don't care. It was a superb selling job and it's been going on for years. Maybe this is a good time to blow the whistle on such an utterly ineffectual and expensive form of medical overutilization.

The corporate exam has become an industry unto itself, and I think that cost-conscious businessmen ought to consider pruning this money tree.

My patient had been examined by a group of doctors who do nothing but routine evaluations of white-collar executives. They're not family physi-

cians who will take care of a sore throat or a Saturday-afternoon pulled muscle. They're more like assembly-line inspectors who, in this case, operate out of suburban Connecticut, a stone's throw from New York City, the financial Big Apple.

My patient had the usual rigmarole: questionnaire about medical history, physical exam, blood count and chemical analysis, urinalysis, vision check, hearing evaluation, stool blood determination, sigmoidoscopy, electrocardiogram, breathing studies and a stress test.

During the stress test, the examiner discovered exercise-induced ventricular tachycardia, a potentially ominous cardiac irregularity that can progress to heart standstill and death. This dangerous warning usually indicates that, during the stress of exercise, a patient's heart cannot obtain enough oxygen and it begins to short-circuit.

This condition almost always requires sophisticated evaluation and the use of medicine to suppress the tendency to irregularity. In the report, the doctor wrote: "this precipitated my stopping the test." He then went on to suggest that my patient eat more roughage and obtain more regular exercise. That was it. No follow-up, no referral to a specialist, no medicine. Now the man is lying in a hospital bed with the front wall of his heart blown out. How's that for preventative medicine?

I haven't yet been able to figure out how much the executive exam cost the patient's company, but it must have been plenty. About \$600 is a ballpark figure. Makes you wonder if our captains of industry are getting their money's worth.

For the purposes of this discussion, forget the unnecessary studies (Does a patient without discernible hearing

loss need a hearing evaluation? No.) and the duplication (a resting cardiogram is routinely performed as part of a stress test, so it needn't be done separately).

Instead of dictating a sugar-coated report, the guy should have been on the telephone referring my patient for real preventative treatment.

Several studies have documented that the incidence of unsuspected and important findings, discovered by routine testing of healthy adults, is less than 1 percent. If any one of the thousands of executives tested annually by assembly-line doctors had a profit margin of less than 1 percent, his business would be a candidate for reorganization under Chapter XIX. Yet these very companies religiously shuttle off their elite on their annual pilgrimages — it's a perk, you know, because the corporations foot the bills.

hesitate to paint or finish it to your taste. After all, you bought the piece to enjoy in your home. Fix it up in a way that pleases you! — POLLY

DEAR POLLY — Here's a tip from my veterinarian about giving pills to cats. He said to get a reasonably long pencil with a good eraser on it, coat the eraser well with butter or margarine, and stick the pill to the eraser. Then put pressure on the back corners of the cat's mouth to open it, quickly insert the pencil far back into the mouth, and the pill will drop off.

Withdraw the pencil and the cat will have swallowed the pill without your getting bitten or scratched in the process. — KATHERINE

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DEAR POLLY — If you have a hole in the wall or any other place, cover it with a piece of adhesive-backed floor tile, then paper or paint over it. It makes a nice-looking repair job. — DANIEL

DEAR POLLY — Instead of buying Christmas paper and ribbon, I do this: I wrap things in newspaper and tie them up with red and green yarn, decorating them with yarn pompons. I also use the pictures from some Christmas cards to decorate the packages. They look very pretty. — LILLIAN

DEAR POLLY — Here is a quick way to dry shoes, especially washable shoes wet from washing. Stuff each shoe with the end of a small towel, or part of a larger towel. After the towel has absorbed a good bit of the water, remove the towel and the shoes will dry fairly rapidly. — JEANNE

DEAR POLLY — For people who sometimes have to go to the hospital in a hurry, it's a good idea to keep a small case packed at all times. It should contain such necessities as toothbrush and paste, comb, talc, deodorant, note paper and pen, and a small amount of change. This has helped me several times. — S.

Polly will send you a Polly Dollar (\$1) if she uses your favorite Pointer, Peeve or Problem in her column. Write POLLY'S POINTERS in care of this newspaper.

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## POLLY'S POINTERS



Polly Fisher

### To paint or not to paint an antique

By Polly Fisher

DEAR POLLY — I recently bought

a lovely little table at an estate sale auction. It was quite inexpensive, but I'm sure the table is fairly old. I'd like to paint it and put it on my sun porch. However, my aunt says that painting it will destroy its value as an antique. Is this true? — ANNE

DEAR ANNE — If the piece is a truly valuable antique, you probably shouldn't paint it — you would indeed be lowering its value. If you really think you bought something in this line, have the piece appraised by a local appraiser, antique dealer or museum. Some local museums will look at a piece quickly for a very small sum. A professional appraisal is likely to be more expensive.

However, if, as I suspect, you simply have a nice little old table, don't

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