

Opinion

Increase workload of health cards

Next February, health cards will be issued with photographs. The announcement by the Ministry of Health this week is a welcome sign.

Since health cards were introduced by the previous Liberal government, there have been accusations of fraudulent use. Cards have been issued to the deceased and at times duplicates have circulated.

The cards, which provide access to the entire health care system, have no identifying features other than the bearer's name.

There is no place for even a signature. Why such a flawed card was ever introduced is



Viewpoint

Paula Crowell

incomprehensible.

All the more reason why ministry officials should have their eyes and ears open to new ideas for the introduction of the latest edition of the health card.

If the ministry is prepared to spend \$90 million over a three-year period to introduce the card and a further \$19

million each year for renewals, it should carefully consider multiple uses for the card.

The card could also be used to track welfare fraud and to provide information about patient drug prescriptions and allergies.

It could provide users with an idea of what their health care costs. Yearly statements could be issued to provide a double-check. Patients could verify that services which were billed were actually offered.

That in itself would be an eye-opener for people who whine about the rising taxation rate.

What about using the card

as a driver's licence too? Health Minister Ruth Grier has already said the ministry intends to distribute health cards through Ministry of Transportation offices.

The technology exists to create a multi-faceted access card which maintains the privacy of individuals.

It should be used, so that we don't have another \$90 million revamp in four years' time.

A lucite moose for a mantle is memorable

It was with mixed emotions that I received the news that Aunt Myrtle had passed away. Mixed, because Aunt Myrtle was a sweet, harmless old crone who had never, in 83 years, done an intentional nasty to another earthling.

On the other hand, she was responsible for the ugliest present I ever saw.

It was truly hideous. A moose clumsily handcrafted from lucite, standing on a chunk of paving stone intended to represent a rocky summit somewhere on the Precambrian shield.

And Aunt Myrtle gave it to me as a wedding present.

Which, of course, meant I couldn't have the horror melted down into a bowling ball, or leave it out by the curb to await adoption by some passerby with even lousier taste than Aunt Myrtle, no.

I had to keep the damned thing, on the off-chance that Aunt Myrtle might drop in and wonder why it wasn't standing over the fireplace.

No more, hurrah. Aunt Myrtle has gone to her reward and the mutant moose is about to, just as soon as I can score a cardboard box big enough to hold it.

Unwanted gifts. Did you ever wonder how much loot we waste on gifts we give to people who hate them? Those fluorescent ties all Dads get at Christmas and on Father's Day?

The bottles of perfume you wouldn't use on a skunk-sprayed dog? The plaid socks? The hardcover books even the author's mother wouldn't read? The fondue sets?

The lucite mooses?

Well, wonder no more. I don't know how much we Canucks throw away on such stuff, but an economics professor at Yale University has calculated that of the \$40 billion Yanks spend each year swapping presents back and forth, somewhere between \$4 billion and \$10 billion is thrown away on stuff the recipient hates on sight — a "dead-weight loss" is how Professor Waldfoegel describes it.

And it's not just useless gifts. When it comes to ethnic protocol, some gifts are downright offensive.

It is a profoundly bad idea to



Basic Black

Arthur Black

gift wrap a Black Forest Ham for an Israeli, or to give a miniskirt to an orthodox Muslim.

Don't ever give cowboy boots to a Hindu — not if they're made out of cowhide. Cows are sacred beasts in India.

Some gift gaffes are less obvious. You can insult a Japanese businessman by offering him a souvenir letter opener. Symbolically, you're advising him to commit hara kiri.

And don't show up on a Guatemalan doorstep with a fistful of white flowers. In Guatemala, white flowers are for funerals.

It's an altogether tricky business, giving gifts. It reminds me of the story of Phil Silvers, the American comedian who gained TV immortality as Sergeant Bilko. Silvers was a very wealthy man, and reputed to be "the man who has everything". But he had a wealthier friend who was determined to buy Silvers a present that would wow him.

The friend invited Silvers to spend a weekend at his mansion in Beverley Hills. Silvers showed up Friday night at the wheel of a magnificent burgundy Rolls Royce Silver Cloud.

"My mechanic's not busy this weekend" said the host, "Why don't you let him give your car a little tune-up?" Silvers shrugged assent. Unknown to the comedian, his car was whisked away to a garage where a team of experts worked around the clock to install a built-in mahogany bar, a hi-fi system, a color television and a VCR.

On Sunday evening as Silvers was preparing to depart, his host had his renovated car brought around to the front. "You might want to check out your jalopy" murmured the host, "just to see if it runs any better." "Ah, who cares?" replied Silvers. "It's only a rental."



ADAM

Adam*

by Brian Basset

