

## Good news, and some bad

It is a sad reflection on human nature that crimes, misdeeds, mishaps, and mistakes are generally more newsworthy than the deeds of good men. It is therefore gratifying to read in our local newspapers about two Polish doctors who, during the German occupation, simulated a typhus epidemic by injecting patients who had other fevers with a harmless bacterium that would yield a positive test for typhus. By frightening the Germans into quarantining some 12 villages and declaring them off limits, they saved thousands of people from death camps or slave labour. One of the doctors, now 87 years old, moved to Chicago in 1958 but only recently revealed this extraordinary story.

It is more difficult to sympathise with the efforts of health activists, however well intentioned, to stop the use of amalgam dental fillings and even have dentists remove those already inserted. Numerous studies have failed to substantiate claims that released mercury causes neurological and other complications. Some 100 million Americans have such fillings, which the American Dental Association has declared safe, yet arguments continue.

In Louisville, Kentucky, a 59 year old former Chicago schoolteacher appeared on television with an artificial heart implanted six weeks earlier for terminal heart failure. Occluding the opening of his tracheotomy tube each time he spoke, he said the operation was his only chance of survival. The heart felt heavy and took some getting used to, as it did not have a heartbeat but a constant whirring sound instead.

Also last month, Cleveland Clinic cardiologists warned about a possible increased risk of cardiovascular events in patients taking the COX 2 inhibitors celecoxib and rofecoxib. Elsewhere there are fears that the recent recall of cerivastatin may cause a backlash and make doctors less aggressive in lowering cholesterol levels an effect possibly counterbalanced by a report that the sagging economy is causing people to eat out less frequently in restaurants. Chicago's Children's Memorial Hospital is offering to perform free of charge a stem cell transplant on a 12 year old illegal immigrant from Mexico who has leukaemia. And in Illinois, the prevalence of Lyme disease has doubled since 1999, spread by ticks feeding on deer and raccoons.