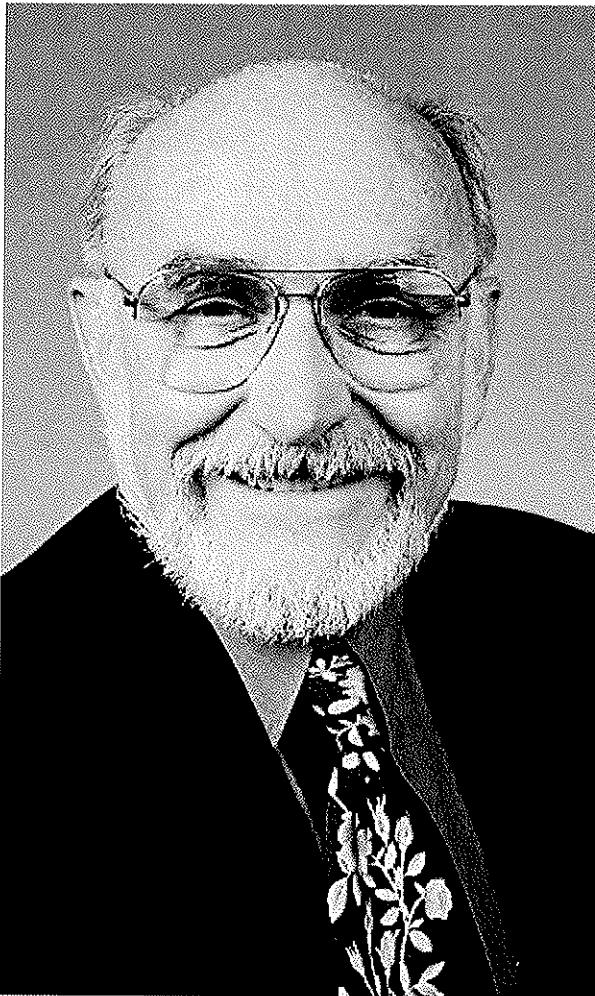


Commentary **Bill Hall** Why it's called a smart phone



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When I visit a doctor's office, I have learned to take along something to read other than the tattered magazines available in the waiting room, and I do so for two reasons:

For one, I have noticed that waiting rooms are overrun with sick people. Oddly enough, hospitals are the same way. You sit there surrounded by people hacking and coughing all over the available reading material. And you help perpetuate the constant contamination

yourself as you read one of those magazines while personally infested with microbes from the black plague, armpit rot or similar complaints.

Secondly, a doctor's office rarely has a wide range of magazines beyond the personal favorites of the doctor you are seeing. That can range from hobby magazines like American Knitting to Airedale Breeders Monthly to the ever-popular Bigfoot Sighting Journal.

But it could be worse. Years ago, back when a generation of doctors went into the profession for the money and the worship as well as for the healing, the medical gods of that time tended to be narrow conservatives politically. Their choices of magazines sometimes tended toward right-wing periodicals of the John Birch Society and other strange publications. Those doctors tried to cure their patients of liberalism as well as of ulcers, itchy feet and enlarged prostates.

Then along came a new generation of more moderate and even liberal doctors who were former Vietnam veterans or peace-and-love flower children. Some of them, just like their earlier conservative colleagues, tended to abuse waiting room patients by providing copies of Mother Jones, The Nation, Marijuana Growers Monthly and other left-of-center publications.

Doctors, right and left, who shoved their personal politics down your throat along with their fingers and their pills were never in the majority of physicians, but some did bore their patients with preachy one-sided political treatises in the waiting room.

Today, the waiting room magazines often include readable, non-political, middle-of-the-road publications. Some medical offices even have a few magazines in those lonely little rooms where you take off your clothes and await your turn with your favorite healer.

However, there are still examination rooms where you cool your heels with nothing to read but wall posters showing gruesome and frightening drawings of human innards.

But take heart. A new era has dawned in which patients are no longer dependent on or threatened by the tedious, preachy and germey magazines in the waiting room. These days, when visiting the doctor places, many of us take along our own electronic book readers, from which we can read the book or magazine of our choice.

And now I have acquired one of those so-called "smart phones." They call them that because the phones are smarter than we are. They do so many things that they involve quite a learning curve before they start working more for you than you do for them.

They are actually powerful pocket computers that deliver not only telephone service but news, weather, music, emailing, texting, sexting, digital books, still and video pictures, even full-length movies if the wait for your turn in the doctor's office is egregiously long.

Best of all, you can sit there with that little hand-held computer-phone reading websites that answer your medical questions. In short, they allow you to get the jump on the doctor's possible diagnosis. You can't quite yet say, as your name is called, "I'm sorry, but I've just discovered what ails me and won't need to bother the doctor today." And the authorities still frown on prescribing your own prescription medicines.

But it's just a matter of time before you can rub a smart phone across body parts that are causing you fear, rashes and discomfort. These smart phones are already capable of reading barcodes on store products. You point the device at the label and the phone will tell you the quality, quantity and price of the product you are considering.

It's not a great leap from there to rubbing the phone on your sore and sick parts, receiving a massage, an injection and even a cheerful little song in the comfort of your own home and in the dotting presence of your favorite spouse, cat or dog.

Oh, it's true that this is the only major nation in the world without health care for all its citizens, but no nation on earth has better telephones.

Hall is editor emeritus of the Tribune's Opinion page. His email address is wilberth@cableone.net.