

Hold My Calls!

In Hong Kong, no one does anything without yakking on a cell phone – or so it seems. Street sweepers gab as they pick up litter. Kids take calls in classrooms. People even answer their phones in toilet stalls, although propriety dictates that the call be over before flushing.

But when Hong Kong's Medical Council, a doctor-run disciplinary board, let a surgeon off the hook in April for chatting on his cell phone during an operation – which he botched –

and then refused to ban phones in operating rooms, the public was outraged.

Now, as Hong Kong's medical establishment labors to repair its battered image, it isn't getting much support for the argument that mobiles are sometimes necessary in operating rooms. Doctors contend they occasionally need immediate access to information, such as



last-minute test results, and that land-line phones installed in ORs don't always reach the operating table.

Cyd Ho, a Hong Kong legislator, has another solution to the problem: PA systems. Ho con-

cedes there are times when access to a phone is important and that sometimes using a cell phone is simply inappropriate, no matter

who is using it. "I need to receive and respond to calls," she says by cell as she leaves a legislative session. "But I also need to concentrate on my work." – *Joanne Lee-Young, Hong Kong*

DATA

What's a Girl to Do?



Today, **16%** of American adults surveyed say young women should study **computers** – the most popular career recommendation.

In 1950, **most** adults – **28%** – told girls to go into **nursing**.

BASED ON SURVEYS OF OVER 1,000 ADULTS. SOURCE: GALLUP ORGANIZATION

Seeing the Writing on the Wall

RELICS

Five millennia ago the Babylonians gave the world handwriting, pressing wedge-shaped "cuneiform" symbols into wet clay. Unfortunately, the passage of time rendered some of the symbols unreadable – until recently, thanks to Tom Malzbender.

For the past 12 years, the Hewlett-Packard researcher has been working with 3D imaging technology for use in gaming and mechanical design. Last year, Malzbender realized there might be another use for his research when he attended an HP-hosted lecture about using digital photography to study ancient artifacts.

The lecturer, University of Southern California archaeology professor Bruce Zimmerman, gave Malzbender a worn cuneiform tablet to photograph and, after a little experimentation, the results were striking: The writing – all of it – was as clear as black ink on a white page. "It was one of



those 'a-ha!' moments," says Malzbender.

The tablet yielded new information about a 5,000-year-old wheat-for-beer deal between a prince and a king. Since then, Malzbender's technology has helped archaeologists uncover more Babylonian business details – the most common subject of existing cuneiform tablets – including the particulars of a money-back-guaranteed slave deal. His technology also helped decode a tablet in which someone had calculated the square root of 2 to six decimal places.

The software has attracted plenty of interest: Stanford University dermatologists want to use it to detect skin cancer, and the San Francisco Police Department, among others, hopes to use it to find footprints and help identify guns that have had their serial numbers scratched off. – *Kathi Black*

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