What I'm Reading (Feb. 21)

By Chuck Dinerstein, MD, MBA — February 21, 2020

Here's what's on tap this time: Is a midlife crisis an unavoidable part of being a social animal? ... Is there an underlying science to scaling an idea, device, or pharmaceutical from the lab to the real-world? ... And what can older companies teach us?

"Toward midlife, chimpanzees and orangutans are most unhappy. Soon after though, their perception of life improves.

In a survey of the caretakers of 508 great apes in five countries, researchers reported the animals' sense of well-being dipped at age 30 or so. They judged happiness by assessing mood swings, social interaction, and goal achievement.

The results could be called a great apes' happiness curve."

Could the mid-life crisis be inevitable? Is it driven by status or satisfaction? From EconLife, What We Can Learn From a Happiness Curve

"The way List sees it, academics like him work hard to come up with evidence for some intervention that’s supposed to help alleviate poverty or improve education; to help people quit smoking or take their blood-pressure medicine. The academic then writes up their paper for an incredibly impressive-looking academic journal — impressive, at least, to fellow academics; to the rest of us, it’s jargony and indecipherable."
But then, with paper in hand, the academic goes out proselytizing to policymakers. He might say: “You politicians always talk about making evidence-based policy — well, here’s some new evidence for an effective and cost-effective way of addressing that problem you say you care so much about.”

And then the policymaker may say, “Well, the last time we listened to an academic like you, we did just what they told us, but it didn’t work, and it cost three times what they said it would, and we got hammered in the press!”

And here’s the thing: the politician and the academic may both be right.”

At the American Council on Science and Health, we explore and comment on both the science and the policy, so this particular piece is a natural fit. What obstacles are there from the laboratory benchtop to the pharmacy counter, or from the randomized controlled trial/observational study to guidelines or recommendations. Is there a pattern or path to bringing an idea to scale? From Freakonomics, Policymaking is Not a Science (Yet) [3], as a podcast or transcript – your choice.

“Back in 2008, a Bank of Korea report found that of 5,586 companies older than 200 years in 41 countries, 56% of them were in Japan. In 2019, there were over 33,000 businesses in Japan over a century old, according to research firm Teikoku Data Bank. The oldest hotel in the world has been open since 705 in Yamanashi and confectioner Ichimonjiya Wasuke has been selling sweet treats in Kyoto since 1000. Osaka-based construction giant Takenaka was founded in 1610, while even some global Japanese brands like Suntory and Nintendo have unexpectedly long histories stretching back to the 1800s.

But what is it about Japan that produces these long-lasting businesses? And in a global era defined by scrappy start-ups that push boundaries at lightning speed, do they have anything to teach us?”

Veneration of the old has many forms. From the BBC, Why so many of the world’s oldest companies are in Japan [4]