

LETTER TO WSJ

Leave the Sinking Ship

By Deepak Chopra

Andrew Weil, MD and Rustum Roy, PhD also contributed to this article.

On December 26, 2008, the Wall Street Journal published "The Touch that Doesn't Heal," an article by Steve Salerno. Without discernible professional credentials in health reportage, the writer opened his piece by pledging allegiance to "scientifically proven, evidence-based medicine." He next declared opposition to integrative medicine, and characterized as "gurus" two proponents of integrative medicine, Deepak Chopra and Andrew Weil, choosing to overlook that we both are highly trained MDs with almost 40 years of clinical-experience. Joining us in our response is Rustum Roy, an internationally known scientist, and member of five major National Academies of Science Engineering, who has spent ten years researching a wide range of health technologies, both ancient and modern. We predict that while they may try to dismiss us, the Wall Street Journal writer and editors will find they can't dismiss a burgeoning field of medicine currently saving and improving millions of lives worldwide.

We believe that Salerno's piece is the opening salvo from the right aiming to influence the incoming administration as it strategically allocates resources for improving the U.S. health and wellness system. Fortunately, Tom Daschle, the upcoming Health and Human Services Secretary is better informed than either the WSJ writer or those who dictate WSJ editorial policy. The co-author (along with Jeanne Lambrew) of *Critical: What We Can Do About the Health Care Crises*, Daschle names the principal challenge to true reform, "[S]pecial interests are especially numerous and influential in the health-care system. Health care comprises one-sixth of our economy... since cutting costs is tantamount to cutting profits for many of these special interests, it is reasonable to expect (an) all-out war to defeat reform."

As in Mr. Salerno's article, this war extends to advancing ill-informed pseudo-scientific arguments to discredit effective low-cost health care options precisely because they compete with the current high-cost system.

"There are many factors driving up health care costs," writes Daschle. "One problem is that 'supply side' forces exist in our health-care system. Physicians both diagnose and treat illness - in economic terms, they create and satisfy demand. . . . Conditions such as 'restless leg syndrome' weren't conditions until drugs were developed to treat them."

In his article Mr. Salerno acknowledged several factors in America's present health care crisis: "disenchantment" over spiraling costs, a bloated bureaucracy, and "possible drug side effects."

While these clearly demand attention, he overlooks the crisis' principal cause: The poor results of the present health care system. Numerous surveys show that for all its bank-breaking expense, the American medical system lags behind the rest of the developed world in most health indicators.

Nor does it sustain a doctor's sworn duty to "first do no harm." Abundant evidence uncovers high-tech medicine, with its powerful drugs, as a major, possibly the leading, cause of death in this country. The National Academy's data attributes 100,000 deaths per year to physicians' errors, added to well over 100,000 deaths due to severe drug interactions and another 100,000 fatalities from hospital-based-infections. (For a detailed analysis, see *Death By Medicine*, by Gary S. Null, et al.)

Why is the allegedly "scientifically proven" health care that the WSJ writer champions so dangerous to health? The blind allegiance to "evidence-based medicine" overlooks how readily this form of research can be manipulated. It was first developed to isolate patentable agents for drug formulations. In scientific arenas outside of mainstream medicine, this "statistics-based medicine" is regarded as dubious science at best. Narrowly confining itself to costly, selectively published, industry-sponsored clinical trials, to promote pharmaceutical products, "evidence based medicine" is the marketing "icon" used by the current system to squelch lower cost competitors.

Science's only gold standard are facts derived from reproducible results, however unpalatable those facts are to current theory. When theories fail to explain the facts, they lose viability. The spectacular failures of "evidence based" medical theories include the millions spent on ineffective AIDS vaccines, the collapse of interferon as the wonder drug for cancer, and the marginal decrease in cancer deaths despite billions wasted during decades of fruitless research. Many once-

standard treatments devised via this theoretical model now stand discredited, like the use of Thalidomide and Thorazine.

As Mr. Salerno and his editors stand bullish on the persistent investment of health care dollars into a model with runaway costs, poor results, lack of available personnel, and questionable science, we are convinced America can do better. Over the last three decades, millions of Americans, and a dedicated group of physicians and practitioners have front-line, hands-on experience with integrative health care. Via concerted research and clinical practice, international scientists and practitioners, have progressively uncovered the root causes and the most effective treatments for health maintenance and restoration. This is science's cutting edge.

Yet like both the mainstream medicine and media, Salerno remains stubbornly ignorant of this vast field, which Daschle and the Obama Administration will undoubtedly consider before allocating billions more to the present, failed, high-cost medical system.

One sine qua non for any future sustainable U.S. health system is the necessity to empower, rather than undercut each citizen's right to choose health care and take responsibility for his/her own wellness. Countless chronic diseases result from the neglect of basic wellness measures. The blame for underutilizing such proactive, cost-saving approaches lies directly with the official policy of blind reliance on drugs and surgery, whatever the cost. The public has been lulled into medical apathy on the false assumption that if something goes wrong, fix-it mechanics will tune up your body the way a garage tunes up your car.

A new integrative medicine system would marry the superb options of high tech emergency care, its brilliant surgical achievements, the tried and least harmful pharmaceuticals, by empowering and educating its citizens to maintain wellness and prevent disease, through improved nutrition, exercise, stress-management, and a wide range of other proven integrative approaches. Sadly, mainstream medicine largely ignores these viable health approaches, because they're not financially lucrative.

To increase competition, reduce costs, and improve outcomes, we recommend that Daschle and his team move toward a more humane, sustainable, and effective health system through the wider adoption of integrative health options. And we invite the Wall Street Journal and its staff writers to board the lifeboat of integrative health, rather than

go down with the Titanic, in yet another failing business sector--
healthcare.