

Throwing Stones

Whew! After the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* seemed to be going soft, even appearing to embrace some aspects of alternative medicine, I was beginning to worry there might be a minor crack in the facade of the halls of traditional medicine. Fear no more, however, for the torch of staid reasoning has been picked up by the *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)*. In a rambling broadside (Vol. 339, No.12) the *NEJM* espouses that they are tired of alternative medicine having a “free ride,” and that, “there cannot be two kinds of medicine — conventional and alternative.” To paraphrase, the so-called traditional view wants medicine that is safe and effective — subjected to testing no less rigorous than required for conventional treatments — only then will such practice be accepted.

I have bad news and good news for the *NEJM*. The bad news for them is that everyday doctors, even the morning news program “telegenic docs,” are actually recommending multiple vitamins, antioxidants, and even specific dietary supplements. The good news for them, and the rest of us, is that on October 20th, Congress passed landmark legislation elevating the Office of Alternative Medicine (OAM), to a full-fledged Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CCAM). The CCAM will have the ability to fund studies long cried for by the likes of those editing the *NEJM*. The legislation provides an initial appropriation to the CCAM of \$50 million.

Who does the alternative and complementary medicine industry have to thank for this? None other than the American Preventive Medical Association (APMA) and long-time congressional sponsors (such as Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa) of the legislation that APMA, and it’s director Candace Campbell, worked on so hard to have passed. Compelling advocacy and well-crafted legislation did the trick. Quite simply, the entire industry owes APMA a tremendous debt, and in my opinion any company or organization not belonging to APMA should join today. Alternative and complementary medicine is no longer the poor stepchild at the National Institute of Health (NIH), but a full-fledged member of the family.

The *NEJM* bemoans the Pandora’s Box opened by the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act. Meanwhile, 100,000-plus deaths occur yearly due to medicines supported by the *NEJM* approach, versus zero deaths yearly attributable directly to dietary supplements. Thousands of emergency room overdoses occur yearly from Tylenol, versus a handful of problems attributable to dietary supplements. Somehow comparisons like this, and many more, seem to get swept under the very lumpy rug of traditional medicine whenever they wax eloquent about dietary supplements or alternative medicine.

The entire *NEJM* broadside seems as truthful and factual as a certain politician’s apology for using the wrong humidior. Those in glass operating theaters should not keep throwing stones, because they’ll soon be hitting their colleagues.

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