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# Identifying and Locating a Qualified Alternative Practitioner

By Jimmy Scott, Ph.D.

Modern medical care is largely the treatment of illness with drugs and surgery, rather than the promotion of the health of the whole human being. The World Health Organization recognized the distinction between health care and sickness care when it defined health as "the physical, mental and social well being of the person, not merely the absence of infirmity or disease." Dissatisfied with the fragmented, overspecialized modern medical model, consumers are increasingly turning to alternative forms of health care.

Among these alternatives are the energy techniques I have described in previous articles in *Health Freedom News*, including Health Kinesiology, Applied Kinesiology, and Touch for Health. Based on my discussion of these methods, perhaps I led you to believe that they might be able to help with a health problem you have. It is one thing to understand that these techniques exist or how these techniques work, but quite another to find someone who is competent to use them. How do you go about finding a health professional who is qualified to practice these or any other alternative techniques?

## SOME ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO HEALTH CARE

If you have been following the story, you are probably aware of many alternative approaches to health care. Here are some of the more commonly mentioned ones:

### Nutrition

Some professionals use diet, nutritional counseling, and nutritional supplements to help correct health problems. Since medical schools provide very little training in nutrition, nutritionists are usually not M.D.s. Registered dietitians are often recommended as reliable sources of nutritional information; unfortunately, however, their training often reflects outmoded ideas about human nutritional needs.

### Allergy Treatment

As it becomes increasingly recognized that allergies (to foods, pollens, dusts, molds, chemicals, and other environmental substances) are responsible for many physical and psychological problems, more and more health practitioners are working with, or outright specializing in, allergy problems. Some are M.D.s with orthodox medical school training, who tend to treat allergy through skin testing and desensitization shots. Clinical Ecologists are primarily M.D.s who use sublingual testing or the newer blood tests to identify allergies, and who recognize that tiny amounts of environmental substances can provoke serious mental and physical reactions. Other health practitioners identify allergies through muscle testing techniques such as Health Kinesiology or Applied Kinesiology (described below,) and treat allergy through diet, nutrition, and/or energy methods.

### Acupuncture

The ancient Chinese system of acupuncture views disease as a disturbance in the body's energy. This energy is regulated and balanced through the insertion of fine needles at acupuncture points along the meridians, or energy pathways, through which the energy flows. A variation on acupuncture is acupressure, which involves pressing on the acupuncture points rather than inserting needles.

### Applied Kinesiology

Applied Kinesiology (AK) uses muscle testing to identify substances to which a person is allergic, according to a concept of allergy in which the offending substance is seen as interfering with the body's energy. The energy system in AK is related to the Chinese system of acupuncture meridians. By blocking the energy flow along a meridian, the allergic substance weakens a muscle related

to that meridian, and so a person's sensitivity to various substances can be detected by testing the strength of the muscle. AK is used by chiropractors as well as nutritionally-oriented health practitioners.

### Health Kinesiology

This comprehensive system of health care uses muscle testing techniques for discovering energy disturbances from all currently known sources, including psychological as well as physical causes. It also uses energy techniques for correcting energy imbalances directly, as well as ascertaining what other steps must be taken to restore the individual to proper balance. Health Kinesiology was the first alternative to grow out of the earlier methodology of Applied Kinesiology and Touch for Health.

### Naturopathy

In the eight states where they are presently licensed, naturopathic doctors generally have the same status as allopathic physicians and surgeons. Naturopaths are trained much like medical doctors, except that instead of spending the bulk of their time in medical school learning about drugs, they are taught about diet, herbs, acupuncture, massage, and other natural approaches, as well as anatomy and physiology.

### Chiropractic

Chiropractors also receive a thorough education in anatomy, physiology, and the functioning of the body. Chiropractors make extensive use of manipulation, believing that alignment of the body is of crucial importance in health, and that malalignments interfere with bodily functions. There are two major divisions of chiropractic practitioners today. The more traditional "straight" school concentrates on the mechanical adjustment of the spine and joints, while the others, "mixers," are more holistic in their approach, using a

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wider variety of techniques including nutrition and muscle testing. Chiropractic has become so widely accepted that many people today consider it a mainstream rather than an "alternative" approach.

### Homeopathy

Homeopaths, who may be M.D.s or lay practitioners, treat illness through the use of very tiny amounts of specially prepared extracts of the same substance that would produce similar symptoms in a healthy person. Homeopathy emphasizes a holistic view of the individual. The selection of the proper remedy takes into account not only physical symptoms, but also psychological and emotional problems and other factors that distinguish the person as an individual.

### Osteopathy

Osteopaths receive essentially the same training as medical doctors, except that they receive more training in manipulation of the spine and joints, similar to chiropractors. Like chiropractic, osteopathy is considered by many to be a mainstream form of health care.

### Massage or Bodywork Therapy

Although the term "massage parlor" has become virtually synonymous in many areas of America with prostitution operations, in actual fact there are many more authentic, well-trained practitioners who offer massage for relaxation, relief of muscle tension, and management of stress. The American Massage Therapy Association sets exacting standards of training and practice for its members. We are becoming increasingly aware that touch can have a healing effect in itself, especially in a society where touch has ceased to become a major element of human communication. In addition to the various forms of "straight massage," there are also many varieties of what are called bodywork, in which the body is manipulated to provide relief of physical and psychological symptoms.

### Others

We could extend the list of alternative forms of health care almost indefinitely, to include biofeedback, relaxation training, iridology, vision training, colonic irrigation, psychic healing,

gem and crystal healing, color therapy, aromatherapy, and many other techniques. The important point here is not to explain each alternative system of health care, but rather to help you to evaluate the qualifications of a practitioner, no matter what system he or she uses. Do keep in mind that the above descriptions are superficial, only to remind the reader about the discipline rather than to explain the discipline.

### WHO PRACTICES THESE TECHNIQUES?

Some of the methods described earlier may be practiced either by M.D.s or by other practitioners. The fact that a practitioner has an M.D. does not necessarily guarantee that that person is a "better" practitioner of the technique in question; in some states an M.D. may attend a weekend workshop on a certain technique and then consider himself qualified to use it on his patients. There are unqualified practitioners in every form of treatment; a license or certificate in itself is no guarantee of the professional's competence.

Licensing laws vary greatly from state to state. Chiropractors are licensed in every state, while naturopaths are licensed in only eight states, and in many foreign countries.

In many states, various agencies are responsible for regulating the practice of some of these techniques. Often these agencies have little to do with the supervision of health care. Because many alternative practitioners use techniques that are not part of the established medical system, the laws often simply cannot accommodate them. For example, a woman in California who wanted only to *teach* the Touch for Health system was told that she would have to have a business license as a massage parlor. However, massage parlors were not allowed in her neighborhood!

Thus, because alternative practitioners often don't fit into traditional categories, they may find it difficult to meet legal requirements. This does not make what they do any less valid or useful, however.

### The Issue of "Unproven" Techniques

Alternative health care techniques are on the increase for helping manage many of our major diseases. This is understandable, since medicine has little to offer people suffering from heart disease, cancer, arthritis, and other serious chronic diseases, except for temporary palliation of their symptoms. Non-medical approaches, including energy work, diet, nutritional supplementation, exercise, biofeedback, visualization, and other psychological techniques, can often produce a dramatic reversal of the disease process without resorting to drugs or surgery. In fact, one recent British research study demonstrated that—with certain types of cancer, psychotherapy was more effective than chemotherapy.

As alternative approaches gain in popularity, organized medicine and the pharmaceutical industry are increasingly directing charges of "quackery" against these competing forms of therapy. Of course, there has always been real quackery on the part of unqualified health care practitioners — among M.D.s as well as "alternative" practitioners.

In an attempt to protect the public from "quackery," Senator Claude Pepper introduced bills before Congress which would prohibit the use of "unproven techniques." Ironically, the Pepper bills failed to recognize that a great many of the techniques employed by modern medicine are just as "unproven" as some of the alternative approaches. In fact, in some cases it has actually been proven that certain medical interventions are useless. For example, studies have shown that the five-year survival rate for heart attack patients who have undergone coronary bypass surgery is no better than for those who do not have the surgery. Similarly, recent studies have shown that breast cancer patients who have radical mastectomies have no better chance of surviving for five years than do the women who have simple lumpectomies, or removal of the malignant lump alone. Yet, these more radical, and expensive, types of surgery are still used.

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### **FINDING HELP FOR YOUR PROBLEM**

With so many possible approaches to health care, and so many people offering alternative techniques to the public, it is understandable that people become confused. How can you locate a practitioner who is truly qualified to practice the form of health care that you want? How can you evaluate the practitioner's qualifications, and the quality of the care provided? How can you as a consumer determine who has the proper training and experience?

### **SOURCES OF REFERRALS**

The first step is to compile a list of people who practice the particular form of health care in which you are interested. You might begin by looking in your phone book for listings of chiropractors, naturopaths, nutritionists, and other holistic health practitioners. You might also ask the owners of local health food stores to suggest professionals in your area. If you already have a family physician or other health care practitioner, ask him/her for suggestions about people specializing in the technique in which you are interested. For many health practitioners, (such as chiropractors) there are professional societies which can serve as sources of referrals. Specialized professional publications may contain listings of practitioners in your area. Your friends can also be an excellent source of referrals. If available, check directories of alternative practitioners in your area.

### **QUESTIONS TO ASK**

Once you have compiled a list of names of practitioners who are likely to use the techniques in which you are interested, you can begin calling to ask specific questions. For example, does the practitioner use muscle testing? Does he emphasize allergy work, or nutrition? Does he use massage, or a specific bodywork technique?

Here are some of the questions you might ask the professionals you call:

**How did you get your training in holistic health methods?**

Since many alternative health care techniques are very new, there may be no official, recognized university degree programs or certificate courses in these methods. You will not necessarily see a certificate on the wall stating that the individual is a qualified practitioner. In fact, certifications are frequently offered by non-accredited schools, and are bought with money rather than earned with effort and skill. Just because someone has a certificate or diploma does not mean that he is adequately trained. Sometimes the certificate may be well earned, but may not represent training in the precise area required. For example, I have met a number of Registered Dietitians who admit to knowing little about natural foods.

**Do you use muscle testing or other energy techniques in your practice? Where did you learn them?**

Perhaps you are interested in finding someone who does muscle testing for allergies. If a practitioner does use muscle testing, you will need to determine where he learned these techniques. There is a big difference between learning energy techniques as part of a weekend massage workshop, and taking courses devoted specifically to muscle testing. Likewise, an entire course devoted to allergy would be preferred to a general course in which allergy techniques were demonstrated. Training workshops and classes sponsored or approved by the recognized professional associations (such as the International College of Applied Kinesiology, or the Touch for Health Association) are often of high quality. This is the sort of training you should look for in a practitioner.

It is common in holistic health circles for people to say, "I trained with..." and give a long list of names of outstanding people in the field. "Training with" someone may mean no more than attending a lecture. If a practitioner says "I trained with so and so," your next question should be, "Will he recommend you?" Always ask the duration of the training and when it occurred.

**How long have you been in practice? How long have you utilized these techniques in your practice, and to what extent do you use them?**

A practitioner who has been using muscle testing for two years, and who has only been in practice for two years, will probably not be at the same level of expertise as someone who has been in practice for 20 years and has been incorporating the techniques for two years. These techniques are not magical cures, but are tools that are most effectively applied to an existing base of knowledge. Keep in mind, though, that a fine tool can still be used by a klutz! There is a big difference between a practitioner who uses these techniques only occasionally, and someone who uses them every day.

**How much experience do you have with my particular problem?**

The more experience a practitioner has with your problem, the more likely he is to know the right questions to ask in dealing with it. However, because there are relatively few holistic health practitioners, they are likely to see a wide range of problems in their practice, and may not have encountered your particular problem. A good practitioner will be honest and straightforward about this, and if he is not familiar with your kind of problem, will let you know whether or not he thinks he can work with you on the basis of related experience. Naturally if the practitioner has experience with your problem, you should also ask how effectively he has dealt with it!

However, with some of the techniques I have mentioned, it really does not matter what your specific problem is. It is not the disease that is being worked on, but rather the deficiencies, imbalances and energy disturbances that are contributing to the disease. So, depending on what approaches the practitioner uses, it may not actually be relevant whether he has experience with your particular problem.

**Can you let me talk to any of your patients, especially others with my problem?**

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Because of confidentiality considerations, this is not an easy question to deal with, but talking to other patients can be very helpful. A secure, ethical practitioner will generally be happy to make the effort to contact patients with similar problems and get their permission for you to talk with them. Keep in mind, however, that good practitioners

are very busy, and locating former patients can be a difficult and time-consuming task, so do not ask too much of this from a practitioner. It may be appropriate to suggest that the practitioner hold evening or weekend classes or discussions. Usually many patients will attend.

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responsible for our own health, and we cannot give up that responsibility to others. The role of the health professional is to work with the individual to determine the best possible set of strategies for maintaining and restoring health in each case. A wide range of appropriately qualified professionals may be able to provide assistance in achieving this goal.

Finally, be very careful of what anyone tells you, no matter how highly qualified he or she may be. If your health professional disagrees with a form of health care that interests you, feel free to seek a second or third opinion. Since you are completely responsible for your own health, it is up to you to consult anyone you want, and then to make your own decision.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JIMMY SCOTT, Ph.D., has written a number of articles for this magazine. In 1989 he moved to a small farm in Canada, where he raises 'energy-balanced' organic vegetables, writes magazine articles and books, consults with people about their health, and also travels extensively in North America and Europe teaching Health Kinesiology. The author of *Cure Your Own Allergies in Minutes*, he has two additional books which will be released soon. Dr. Scott may be reached at RR3, Hastings, Ontario, K0L 1Y0, Canada, or by calling (705) 696-3176, FAX (705) 696-3664. □

#### What Will Your Insurance Cover?

Most alternative health care is not covered by insurance, for the simple reason that the insurance industry is controlled by orthodox medicine — hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, and the traditionally schooled medical doctors and their organizations. Because the way the "health care delivery system" is set up in this country, the fact that certain forms of treatment are covered by insurance actually drives the cost of that treatment higher. Thus the techniques without insurance coverage are generally not as costly as the orthodox methods.

In an effort to compete with demonstrably effective alternative forms of health care, many orthodox medical establishments are now offering similar options, with full insurance coverage. For example, the popularity of midwives and home births has caused hospitals to establish birthing centers, providing a homelike environment within the hospital. At the same time, midwives working out in the community remain subject to harassment and arrest.

#### Careful Consumerism Applies to All Health Practitioners

The questions and screening methods I have described in this article don't apply just to alternative practitioners. You can apply them equally well in evaluating any health practitioner — whether an M.D., a private duty nurse, a dentist, or even a veterinarian.

Remember that it is ultimately your power as a consumer that will determine what options are available. If you want alternative practitioners to have more freedom to provide their forms of health care, it is up to you to demand that their services be more readily available. It is up to you to patronize these alternative practitioners, to write letters to your representatives in Congress, and to object when alternative practitioners are harassed and arrested on spurious charges.

It is up to you to be a discriminating consumer of health care. Each of us is

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