

Healthwatch

by Steven Bailey N.D.

The new medical McCarthyism

America is witnessing a new McCarthyism. This resurgence of oppressive politics is being waged in the area of state and national health policies. Ironically, one of the single most oppressive pieces of legislation is being promoted by Rep. Claude Pepper, (D) Florida, as "anti-quackery." Unfortunately, Representative Claude Pepper, whose illustrious record as proponent and author of much of the social legislation of the New Deal and Fair Deal, is presently being used by the A.M.A. to push its reactionary legislation to outlaw Naturopathic, Chiropractic and other alternative medicines in the guise of concern for the elderly.

This bill would utilize federal agencies such as the U.S. Post Office (prevent interstate transport of unaccepted literature), the Justice Department, the F.D.A. and the F.T.C. to oversee the enforcement of the new regulations. What is frightening about this legislation is 1) it passed in similar form two years ago only to be blocked in the U.S. Senate, and 2) the first portion of the bill "allows the AMA and its affiliate state organizations and county medical societies to adjudicate acceptable standards of medical practice and medical treatment. Any diagnosis or therapy lying outside these standards would be prohibited by law. Those practitioners who continue to practice non-accepted techniques would be considered to be practicing fraudulently, and would be subject to criminal felonies and delinquency."

What furthers the irony is that in the last decade the F.T.C. ruled that the A.M.A. was intentionally misrepresenting and interfering with the growth, practice and development of alternative forms of medicine. The F.T.C. ordered a cease and desist restraint on the A.M.A. Now, if this bill passes the F.T.C. would be obliged to enforce the A.M.A. wishes.

Let's get to the heart of the issue. Are nutritional counselors, nurse practitioners, naturopaths, chiropractors and others ripping off the elderly? Is there an inherent "quackery" in dietary management of disease? Should vitamins be prescription items? I think the answer to all these questions is a clear NO! Further, I believe the overt efforts by the A.M.A. and its state affiliate organizations to repress dietary and herbal alternatives and the central issue the freedom to choose your own physician or practitioner, is to a large part allowing a great deal of iatrogenic (treatment caused disease) illness and quackery within its own under-regulated ranks.

A quote from the March 12, 1981 New England Journal of Medicine speaks to the iatrogenic presence in the U.S. The hospital where this study was conducted was in New England.

"We found that 36 percent of 815 consecutive patients on a general medical service of a university had an iatrogenic illness. In 9 percent of all persons admitted the 'incident' was considered major in that it threatened life or produced considerable disability."

"We defined an iatrogenic illness as any illness that resulted from a diagnostic procedure or from any form of therapy."

"Thus we believe that these criteria are conservative; if the study had judgmental bias, the effect was to underestimate the number of iatrogenic illnesses."

As to the "anti-quackery" portion of this bill, let me turn to a recent article by internationally-known author and pediatrician Robert Mendelsohn, M.D.

"The late Morris Fishbein, M.D., was a long-time editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. In his lectures on "Medical Quackery" to medical students (myself in-

cluded) at the University of Chicago, Dr. Fishbein used to give the three criteria for quack medicines: 1) unproven remedies, 2) highly expensive, 3) widely publicized.

"How well that definition fits most of Modern Medicine. Take, for example, cancer chemotherapy. No form of cancer chemotherapy has ever been subjected to controlled scientific study in which half the candidates for therapy receive the treatment and the other half do not."

"Oncologists feel such an experiment would be 'unethical.' They be-

lieve so strongly in their treatment that they would not withhold it from a single patient. However, they do not consider unethical the exposure of patients to unproven chemical treatments that can kill them."

"Doctors rely on 'historical' controls. They boast to patients that leukemia used to be 95 percent fatal 50 years ago and now, because of treatment, it is only 50 percent fatal. But they don't tell their patients that the concept of 'historical controls' is anathema to true science. Scientists know that diseases come and go."

Today we have new diseases — AIDS, herpes, toxic shock, Legionnaires' disease. Old diseases like scarlet fever and rheumatic fever have either practically disappeared or dramatically decreased in virulence without any help from doctors. The only controls that count in science are 'contemporaneous' controls."

"Every patient should ask three questions of an oncologist who threatens them with chemotherapy or radiation or surgery: 1) 'Doctor, do all your patients follow your advice?' Of course, his answer must be 'no' since

no doctor enjoys a 100 percent compliance rate. 2) 'Doctor, what happens to those patients who don't follow your advice?' His answer must be 'We don't know,' since doctors don't follow patients who reject their advice. 3) 'In that case, doctor, how do you know that the patients who reject your advice don't out-survive those who accept it?' Since the doctor doesn't know the answer to this crucial question, the only conclusion is that the most dangerous cancer quackery today is that which is 'inside' Modern Medicine."

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