

Your Health

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High Profile Disinformation Alternative "Facts" in Van Sun Alt Med Article

In late November the Vancouver Sun ran a two page spread in the front section on "alternative medicine." Unfortunately, the article was poorly researched, riddled with errors and oddly incongruent—making no distinction among licensed health professions, unlicensed professions, therapies, modalities or simply ideas on health. Additionally, the Sun "rated" clinical evidence for each topic with a happy, neutral or sad face, a disingenuous tactic given the Sun's lack of research supporting the "research" and using the faces inconsistently across topics. Below is the BCNA's letter to the editor of the Sun (which they chose not to publish).

Dear Editor,

I read with interest your article on alternative medicine published in the October 22 edition of the Vancouver Sun. The British Columbia Naturopathic Association is pleased that the Sun is educating its readers about complementary and alternative medicine and the benefits it provides to patients. We would like to further educate readers on naturopathic medicine and its contribution to the overall health of British Columbians.

In BC, hundreds of thousands of patients visit naturopathic physicians each year, which makes naturopathic medicine an integral part of the health care system. Naturopathic medicine is science-based primary health care that focuses on disease prevention and wellness.

Licensed by the government of British Columbia since 1921, naturopathic physicians have a proud history of delivering safe, affordable and effective medical care. Their education includes a minimum of three years of pre-medical training followed by four years of full time study at an accredited naturopathic college. In fact, students of naturopathic medicine receive more training in basic and clinical sciences than students at standard medical schools.

Given these facts, British Columbia's naturopathic physicians are troubled that the Vancouver Sun would suggest to its readers that there is a lack of clinical evidence behind what we do. This is simply not the case. We are trained in a variety of healing arts mentioned in the article that received "positive ratings" for clinical evidence, including Traditional Chinese Medicine and Western Herbal Medicine. Clinical tests have shown that naturopathic health care provides safe and effective treatment for several common maladies including osteoarthritis, asthma, common skin irritations, back pain, depression, diabetes, HIV, digestive issues, migraine headache, ear infections, and respiratory infections, among many others. Often, naturopathic treatments are equally good or better than standard medical treatments.

The article also mistakenly named the BCNA as the regulatory body for naturopathic medicine in BC. In fact,

the College of Naturopathic Physicians licenses and regulates naturopathic physicians in this province. The article also listed both licensed primary health care providers, such as naturopathic physicians and chiropractic doctors, together with complementary and alternative treatments, such as gemstone therapy and raw foods. This is a little like saying lawyers and the stationery they use are one and the same.

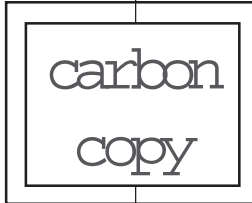
Inside **YH**

**Folic Acid Saves Lives
Calcium Supplements
Save Billions
see pages 4-5**

**In the News
BC NDs Profiled
Recent Research
Trends & Outcomes
see pages 2-3**

**Focus:
Integrated Medicine
US leads Canada,
Arizona advances
see page 6**

Ms. K Charter, a patient of an ND in the Lower Mainland shares her correspondence to MLA Gary Collins. A response from Burnaby Willingdon MLA John Naraney follows.



Mr. Collins, you ask British Columbians how to spend that substantial surplus—for which I congratulate you. I would like you to spend some of it on Alternative and Preventive Medicine. It must be abundantly clear from past experience that no matter how much money is thrown into our Health/Disease Care System as it is, it will never be sustainable. It no doubt would cost money to begin with to bring in alternatives but am sure over time it would save billions of dollars. I give you two out of countless examples.

On May 24 I was a happy, healthy, independent 92 year old who kept that way by taking responsibility for my own health—at my expense. That day I had an accident, broke a hip and had hip replacement next day. In hospital I was a medical miracle as I had not taken drugs for 25 years when all the doctors had patients taking up to 15 pills a day. I was only in hospital two weeks and three days to the amazement of hospital staff. After another 12 days (total 31) I was home on my own. Many seniors, I understand, are in hospital for months. I was walking on my own in less than two months. They all knew it was because I had taken care of myself over many years. In three and a half months I am almost back to where I was. Doesn't it make sense that it saves money! I would like to see Integrated Medicine—so we can have both MDs and NDs working together. I wouldn't go to my ND for a broken hip, but I wouldn't go to my MD for advice on nutrition, etc. You know, I think a lot of people don't know that NDs have the same length of training that MDs do—the first three years pre med are the same, the next four years when MDs are learning to write prescriptions and cut you open, NDs are learning nutrition and healthy lifestyle using natural medicines. Why should they not be on an even playing field?

Example #2: When I was having chelation

When I was having chelation treatments I met a man from Whitehorse, who had had angiogram, angioplasty and four heart bypasses paid by MSP. What would be the estimated cost, maybe \$100,000? He was still sick, unable to go back to work. He took a series of chelation [treatments], which cost about \$5,000, and was well and back working... Wouldn't that save money, having him being productive and paying taxes, instead of still going to MDs and taking expensive drugs?

treatments recently I met a man from Whitehorse, who had had angiogram, angioplasty and four heart bypasses all paid by MSP. What would be the estimated cost, maybe \$100,000?. He was still sick, unable to go back to work driving a truck. He took a series of chelation [treatments], which cost about \$5,000, and was well and back working. He comes to Vancouver yearly for maintenance of five treatments, which would cost about \$600. Wouldn't that save money, having him being productive and paying taxes, instead of still going to MDs and taking expensive drugs? Chelation has been used for more than 60 years that I know of and I don't believe there is one death recorded because of it. That can't be said about traditional treatment!

It has cost me a lot of money, and I am on OAP and CPP, *but* many friends a lot younger than I are always in MD's offices, taking those 15 pills a day and are still sick. In 2001 I spent \$4,000 on alternative care but don't think it is fair. I even pay GST. The cost of drugs is obscene and absolutely ridiculous. I read that we have more than 21,000 drugs, so if they do any good why do we need more billions spent on research for more costly drugs? Why aren't some of those billions spent on researching herbs and plants, which the good Lord gave us for our use, instead of synthetic drugs, which have *many* serious side effects. I had a Chinese doctor ask me, "Why do you call your medicine, traditional? We have used ours for thousands of years."

Dear Ms Charter,

Thank you very much for sharing your thoughts. I have, for the past year, been working with groups and the health ministry to devise a way to recognize evidenced based alternative medicine. I am a great believer in the alternative methods of treatment, particularly, herbal. I fully agree with your views and I can assure you that the ministry is looking at all different methods to not just "fixing" the problem in health care but to finding a lasting and holistic method. I always appreciate your messages.

John Nuraney, MLA

A herbal medicine, used in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) for centuries, appears to reduce the impact of dementia, shows a small study.

Called ba wei di huang wan (BDW), the herbal has been used throughout China, Japan and Korea.

After taking the supplement for eight weeks, the 16 trial subjects showed a boost in mental functioning, and in their ability to complete day-to-day activities. The placebo group saw no such benefit.

"These results argue the benefits of BDW in the treatment of dementia," write the researchers from Tohoku University School of Medicine in Miyagi, Japan, in the September issue of the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society (volume 52, issue 9, pp 1518).

The participants had mild to severe forms of dementia for an average of five years.

The reasons for this benefit are unclear, according to the researchers, although BCNA member Dr. Peter Bennett, an ND with a interest in and practice focus on TCM, notes that this remedy enhances adrenal function.

BCNA member Dr. Jeanne Paul was profiled in Vancouver's Georgia Straight at the end of October. Dr. Paul, a Coast Salish native, is BC's only First Nations ND. She incorporates her cultural heritage into her practice, which encompasses physical, mental and spiritual wellness, with a special focus on resolving issues such as grief, anger and abandonment. On Thursday, October 8 BCNA member Dr. Nigma Sciortino appeared on CKNW's Jennifer Mathers radio show, to discuss the growing interest in and use of complementary medicine. Dr. Sciortino also appeared on Breakfast TV, on November 5, where she was able to address the errors in the Vancouver Sun article, as we noted on page one...

I just watched all this stuff on the health summit, and it makes me sick. These guys act as if medical costs are just going to continue to climb. Nobody is saying, Our country is not healthy, we've got to reduce the need for medical care. We think the economy is everything, and we don't see that it—like health, like everything else—depends on the health of the planet.

David Suzuki



Extensive studies are finally confirming what most people know intuitively: Increased pressures and technological change in the workplace cause a myriad of stress related health disorders.

American, Swedish, Finnish and British research all show that strain in the workplace can affect health.

Changes in organization, particularly downsizing, can have a severe health impact. For example, major corporate downsizing, in comparison with a "stable firm" can lead to a 200% increase in the incidence of heart disease. Alternatively, workers are able to handle moderate expansion with ease, but radical expansion led to a 9% increase in hospital admissions.

One study noted that the immune systems of the highly stressed subjects were equivalent to 90 year old control subjects. Stress can also exacerbate existing conditions.

Naturopathic doctors are educated in dealing with individuals suffering from stress and stress-related disorders, as well as coping mechanisms and stress-reduction techniques.

We have been bombarded by journalists, politicians and ordinary Canadians telling us about the inadequacies of our health care system. I am of a different view: it's fine. ...The problem lies with the people. How many of us eat terribly, fail to exercise, remain in high-stress jobs and generally fail to take care of our health? In my case it was job stress, bagels and cream cheese and fried chicken, along with genetic factors, that led to a heart attack—a tremendous user of medical resources. If we were to take better care of ourselves, the load on the medical system would be reduced.

J. Whitaker in a letter to Maclean's

IN BRIEF: Deaths from brain diseases, such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and motor neuron disease, have tripled in the last twenty years; the report's authors stating that chemical pollution was to blame. Researchers found that leukemia deaths are 70% higher among people who live near AM radio broadcasting towers. Prozac was found in the UK water supply. Researchers found that an immune-system disorder stemming from stress [see above] caused Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. A study showed that children who watch two hours of TV each night are at higher risk for becoming obese, smokers, and suffering from high cholesterol.

Sources: Maclean's magazine, October 4, October 25, November 1, 2004; Harper's, October 2004; New York Times, September 5, 2004; Yahoo

Supplements Save Lives—and Money

The American diet, becoming a common “western” diet across several continents, has insufficient levels of nutrients to support long-term health and prevent many chronic ailments. That’s a fact naturopathic doctors have known for decades. To deal with that, NDs have recommended dietary modifications with the use of supplements appropriate to an individual’s age and overall health. Still, there has been a lack of research supporting the use of supplements over the long-term. A recent US evidence-based study on nutrient levels in the average American diet showed that long-term supplement use can not only support optimal health but that overall cost savings through disease prevention were significant. On this and the facing page we highlight some of the results of this study. The study’s authors examined closely several supplements where there is the highest standard of evidence, to date, to support health claims, and for which the US Food and Drug Administration has formally approved health claims. (All the statistics listed below are for the US population and all dollar figures are in US dollars.)

Research Fast Facts:

- Type-2 diabetes patients who take supplements reported fewer infections than those who did not take supplements
- High doses of vitamin supplements benefited individuals with Age-related Macular Degeneration
- Trauma patients who received vitamins E and C spent less time in Intensive Care Units and were “less likely to experience organ failure”
- The progression of Alzheimer’s disease may be slowed by high doses of vitamins

Focus: Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) accounts for nearly 40% of all deaths in the US. In 2001, about 150,000 individuals under the age of 65 died from CVD. Many clinical studies show that omega-3 fatty acids have beneficial effects on CVD. Additional studies show the positive impact on a number of chronic conditions, such as depression, renal disease, rheumatoid arthritis and asthma. Omega-3 fatty acids may also help lower blood pressure, reduce the risk of re-blockage after an angioplasty, may increase exercise capacity in people with coronary atherosclerosis, and may reduce the risk associated with irregular heartbeats.

Focus: Folic Acid

Neural Tube Defect (NTD) occurs in one of every 1,000 US pregnancies. The total lifetime cost of a baby with NTD is roughly \$532,000. Of the 64 million women of childbearing age, even if just 10½ million additional women began taking 400 micrograms of folic acid on a daily basis, periconceptionally, approximately 600 babies would be born without NTDs, saving in excess of \$321 billion. However, given the very low cost of folic acid, if prospective mothers continued to take supplements over five years, the lifetime savings would greatly increase.

Focus: Glucosamine

Randomized, double-blind clinical studies on glucosamine are currently underway, but at the time of this research were not complete. The data on glucosamine, though overwhelmingly positive, is currently not in keeping with the study methods most acceptable to establishment medical schools and research labs. Nevertheless, the anti-inflammatory effects of glucosamine are well documented and it has been shown to repair and maintain cartilage. The traditional treatments for osteoarthritis, knee joint pain, swelling and stiffness, are anti-inflammatory drugs. These drugs produce variable results and may cause significant toxicity. The use of complementary medicine, in particular glucosamine, is seen as a key factor in mediating the need for drug therapy, not only in terms of cost-savings but reducing drug side effects.

Focus: Saw Palmetto

Randomized clinical trials on the effects of saw palmetto for alleviating the symptoms of benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) indicate slight to moderate improvement. However, in men suffering from BPH, the herb also increased urinary flow, improved the quality of life, and was well-tolerated. Further, there are as yet no known safety hazards or contraindications for those using saw palmetto with standard drug therapy. Saw palmetto is considered an excellent first-line therapy; the alternatives include alpha-adrenergic blocking agents, finasteride, surgical interventions or, what MDs call “watchful waiting” (i.e., no specific therapy).



Focus: Calcium

Daily calcium and vitamin D intake can substantially reduce the incidence of hip fractures in the over-65 years of age population. Over a period of five years, 734,000 hip fractures could be avoided. Because hip fractures often require both in-hospital surgical procedures as well as a prolonged stay in a nursing home, they are one of the most costly health issues dealt with in the medical system. Supplementation can not only reduce the incidence of fractures, but the net savings in hospital, nursing facility and physician expenditures is nearly \$14 billion annually—see chart below showing costs and potential savings.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
Gross Cost of Providing Daily Calcium for Adults over 65 (in millions)						
Total cost of daily calcium for new users (adults over 65 not currently taking calcium) and current users paid for by payer over time	\$575	\$714	\$833	\$957	\$1079	\$4149
Current Cost of Hip Fracture Among Adults over 65 (in millions)	\$7514	\$7515	\$7829	\$8155	\$8494	\$39,148
Cost offset (Potential Savings) from Reduced Hip Fractures (in millions)						
Cost offset due to avoided hospitalizations, physician services, and SNF stays associated with reduced hip fractures for population most at risk	\$3076	\$3231	\$3393	\$3561	\$3737	\$16,988
Net Cost of Providing Daily Calcium with Vitamin D to Adults Aged 65+ (in millions)						
Net cost of daily calcium for adults over 65 (savings)	-\$2645	-\$2696	-\$2768	-\$2843	-\$2934	-\$12,849
Premium Offset (in millions)						
Premium offset (25% of additional program spending)	\$144	\$178	\$208	\$239	\$268	\$1,037
Total potential cost offset from avoided health care utilization associated with avoided hip fracture (savings)	\$2646	\$2696	\$2768	\$2843	\$2934	\$13,886

The study referred to in this issue: *Improving Public Health, Reducing Health Care Costs: An Evidence-Based Study of Five Dietary Supplements*. Joan DaVanzo, PhD, Allen Dobson, PhD, K Jeannine Dollard, MPA, Myra Tanamor, MHSA, Heather McPheron

Arizona Leads Continent in Progressive Health Care

reprinted from the Arizona Republic, September 2004

Valley pediatrician Robert Kull got fed up popping pills to combat high blood pressure. So he went to see a naturopathic doctor. He's now off the medication, has his blood pressure under control and feels much better.

"I was just so tired of taking a bunch of pills," Kull, 61, said during a recent visit with his ND. "I'm taking the alternative route because it's just another way of looking at things. I've now made significant changes to my diet and I'm doing a lot better."

Arizona is home to more than 10 percent, or 400, of the 3,000 licensed [NDs in the US]. The state is also home to one of only four accredited naturopathic medical schools in the United States. NDs flock to the state to take advantage of Arizona's licensing laws, which allow them to prescribe drugs and have a broader scope of practice.

"Medically, Arizona is the most progressive state in the country when it comes to integrating conventional and naturopathic medicine," said Paul Mittman, a naturopathic physician and president of the Southwest College of Naturopathic Medicine and Health Sciences.

"Naturopathic doctors work side by side here with conventional medical doctors, and I don't think that occurs to the same degree in other states. They see that we don't have horns and that we're not out there shaking branches and sprinkling herbs on people."

An increasing number of patients and conventional doctors are seeking alternative medical care in Arizona. Patients are demanding access to holistic therapies, and more conventional doctors are either learning about alternative care or are referring patients to NDs.

Licensed naturopathic physicians attend a four-year medical school and study the same basic sciences and diagnostic

techniques covered in a traditional medical school. NDs, however, also study acupuncture, botanical medicine and other alternative therapies. They are trained in primary care and emphasize disease prevention and non-toxic approaches to therapy, such as lifestyle changes, nutrition and stress reduction. In some states, including Arizona, NDs can prescribe most medications and perform minor surgeries, such as mole removal and stitches.

Valley health professionals say that the local advances and patient demand have pushed Arizona to the forefront of holistic medicine. "Other states are slowly following our lead," said Dr. Klee Bethel, a conventional medical doctor and chairman of the board for the naturopathic college. "We're somewhat of a model for other states and we frequently get calls from other state medical boards who are looking into licensing alternative practitioners."

"The future of naturopathic medicine is huge, and I think that as time goes by, we'll see that in many instances, it's more cost effective than the traditional pharmaceutical approach," Bethel said. Dr. Ken Pettit, a family practice physician in Ahwatukee Foothills, said many patients seek out alternative care because they want a doctor who will spend more than just a few minutes with them.

Mittman said he often works with patients who suffer from chronic, debilitating diseases and conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, chronic fatigue and pain. However, in cancer cases, he only works with patients if they are also seeing an oncologist, a cancer specialist. "We certainly refer to (conventional) doctors or surgery, severe diseases and sometimes medication," Mittman said. "We don't have all the answers."

Mittman said it's important for both allopathic and naturopathic doctors to continue to work together to provide a complete scope of care.

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PHYSICIAN REFERRALS * NATUROPATHIC MEDICAL INFORMATION * STUDENT INFORMATION

Your Health is published quarterly by the British Columbia Naturopathic Association, the professional association for naturopathic physicians in the province. It is compiled and edited by Glenn Cassie. The information provided herein is for educational and reference purposes only; it is not intended as a substitute for consultation and diagnosis nor treatment from a qualified doctor.

Your Health is provided free to BCNA members.

The BCNA offers patients, across the province, referrals to licenced naturopathic doctors (NDs) in their area, as well as student information to persons interested in the profession. It is the BCNA's purpose

to advance the scientific, educational and professional aspects of naturopathic medicine.

The public is welcome and encouraged to join the BCNA. An annual membership fee of \$25 assists the BCNA in its efforts to increase government recognition and heighten the profession's profile. Membership entitles you to a one-year subscription to Your Health and other news and information bulletins.

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