

Letters to the Editor
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To the Editor:

I hardly knew whether to laugh or cry as I read Dr. Jerome Groopman's misguided criticism of Alternative Medicine (*No 'Alternative,'* August 7). Usually a seasoned and perceptive writer on both medical and spiritual topics, I was naturally eager to read this editorial. But, to my dismay, here Dr. Groopman resorts to name calling. He refers to "understandably desperate patients" who yearn for non-pharmaceutical alternatives; calls nutritional supplements "elixir(s) from a health food store"; and says that when he himself was seriously ill, he also "felt the powerful temptation to seek a magical solution."

Unfortunately, this isn't his worst offense. In his *New Yorker* articles, Dr. Groopman shows a healthy skepticism for the foibles of the medical/pharmaceutical establishment. Here he seems to naively trust pharmaceutical company trials, as well as those studies that confirm his belief that alternative treatments do NOT work. While he blindly and misguidedly trusts those studies that "prove" that alternative treatments don't work, he praises pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies that, according to him, "rely on biological mechanisms to select candidate drugs for testing, rather than unsubstantiated testimonials and anecdotes."

Has Dr. Groopman completely missed David Armstrong's excellent *WSJ* articles exposing physician/pharmaceutical company ties? In three articles within this past month, Mr. Armstrong has shed a bright light on the fact that some physicians who conduct studies -- including studies ostensibly NOT financed by pharmaceutical companies -- are often on pharmaceutical payrolls that may well influence study outcomes. (Please see: July 11th (*Drug Interactions: Financial Ties to Industry Cloud Major Depression Study*); July 12th (*JAMA to Toughen Rules on Author Disclosure*); and July 19 (*Medical Reviews Face Criticism Over Lapses.*) In a fourth article (*Cleveland Clinic Defends Gift From a Vendor*, August 8), Mr. Armstrong exposed a similar vendor/hospital alliance.

David Armstrong's articles should be required reading for physicians, like Dr. Groopman, who point to the purity of trials conducted by (or related to) pharmaceutical companies as opposed to trials involving alternative medical treatments.

Kudos to Mr. Armstrong. All I can say about Dr. Groopman is that I have always enjoyed his writing, and that I therefore expected better from him.

Sincerely,

Julia Schopick

Medical Advocate

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