

by Mickey Z.

When actress Farrah Fawcett recently sought out "alternative" cancer treatment, she was greeted with predictable media scorn. For example, ABCNews.com (October 3) characterized such a choice as a "last-ditch attempt to find a cure, one that brings the patient into a murky world of offshore clinics and unproven courses of treatment that are scorned by the medical establishment."

Speaking of the "medical establishment," ABC News quoted Barrie Cassileth, chief of the Integrative Medicine Department at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. Cassileth said patients pursuing "alternative" approaches are "signing their own death certificate." Dr. Cassileth added: "I would say they are wasting time they could otherwise spend happier and with their families."

Almost 600,000 American die of cancer each year (roughly 1500 per day) and a new case is diagnosed every seven seconds. Yet, the Western medical priesthood stigmatizes alternatives and aggressively defends its Holy Trinity of cancer treatment: surgery, radiation, and of course, chemotherapy.

"We've been told that it's only the treatments of orthodox medicine that have passed careful scientific scrutiny involving double-blind placebo-controlled studies," write Gary Null and Dr. Debora Rasio. "Concomitantly, we've been told that alternative or complementary health care has no science to back it up, only anecdotal evidence. These two ideas have led to the widely accepted 'truths' that anyone offering an alternative or complementary approach is depriving patients of the proven benefits of safe and effective care, and that people not only don't get well with alternative care, but are actually endangered by it."

This includes the doctors themselves. As reported by John Robbins in *Reclaiming Our Health*, the percentage of oncologists who, if they had cancer, would not participate in chemotherapy trials due to its "ineffectiveness and its unacceptable toxicity" is 75%. Conversely, the percentage of Americans with cancer that receive chemotherapy is...you guessed it: 75%.

By odd coincidence, there was another October 3 ABCNews.com story on the topic of cancer. It seems a Long Island woman was told she had breast cancer, underwent a double mastectomy, and then learned that the lab made a mistake. She didn't have cancer. Deemed a "mix-up," the whole thing was blamed on "a technician who admitted cutting corners while labeling tissue specimens."

Obviously, "murky" and "unproven" are in the eye of the beholder. But until American health care consumers move toward awareness, self-education, and *prevention*, all they're doing is debating which pen to use when "signing their own death certificate."

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