

UNDER THE WEATHER

In Defense of Allopathy

I gave the prescription to Roger's guardian and started explaining the doses when she said suspiciously, "I hope there are no steroids in this." As it happened there were no steroids for Roger, but variations of this scenario play out almost daily in most veterinarians' clinics. And then we need to explain why steroids/antibiotics/whatever else they are suspicious about are needed.

I am beginning to lose patience with these new-age educated class who read 'informative articles about the horrendous side effects of allopathy'. Not surprisingly written by practitioners of alternative therapies. I have nothing against alternative medicine. If you feel it works, by all means, use it. But for heaven's sake, give credit where it's due. All the age old therapies, be it *Ayurveda*, homeopathy, faith healing, *Reiki* have been around for thousands of years. What was the expected lifespan of people then? In our great-grandparents' time, people died rampantly of infections, cancer, autoimmune diseases – the average life expectancy was about 55-60 years at most. It is only after the discovery of antibiotics, steroids and chemotherapeutic drugs that people's lifespan has increased. and we now expect to live into our 80s.

Science should be moving us forward, bringing about a better understanding of how phenomena work. Unfortunately pseudo-scientists introduce mysticism and magical thinking into the mix, which is very attractive to many new-age healers because it supports their spiritual leanings. They dress up their healing methods in scientific-sounding jargon about energies, quantum physics, activated molecules of water or whatever catches their fancy. However, such thinking does not advance science; it takes it back to an earlier time, a time when the world was dominated by magical powers, a time when people died young.

It does little to advance our understanding of medicine and it will continue to fail to convince the scientific community



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at large, which has a higher standard of evidence. Allopathic medicine is a system of rigorous testing, evidence collection, statistical analysis and controls, to ensure that a treatment is effective when recommended to patients. If it works and it is strongly corroborated, we call it allopathy – whether the source is molecules derived from plant extracts or synthetic molecules, and it is available to professionally-trained medical doctors to use or prescribe for their patients.

Allopathy is nothing but a system of healing that is backed by science. It includes several active ingredients derived from plants. e.g. One of the most common medicines used for heart failure is *Digoxin*, extracted from a plant called Foxglove. Similarly, *Vincristine*, a

medicine used to treat certain types of cancers is extracted from the Vinca plant. Both these medicines have uses and side effects. It is silly to presume that anything natural is safe, and anything synthetic is toxic. Some of the most deadly poisons known to man are derived from plants – remember Hemlock? There is a long list of plant poisons, just as there is a long list of safe and useful chemicals. The point is to understand what works and what doesn't; what really acts, and what is a placebo in self-limiting illnesses. Alternative medicine is simply that – alternative to medicine. It is not rigorously tested, double-blind controlled or statistically analysed. It is built on belief without true empirical evidence. Actually no one should have to defend allopathic medicine. The evidence is there for all to see. It is an open and honest science. Every side effect is documented as rigorously as the benefits. The benefits of most allopathic medicines far outweigh side effects.

Antibiotics have helped millions of people with deadly infections. Steroids have helped patients with crippling autoimmune disease, amongst other things. Chemotherapy has healed millions of cancer patients. For every patient who has been healed with faith healing, there are thousands cured with allopathy. Yet, somehow, there is no temple being built for allopathy.

