

From Our Readers

Dear Editor,

Please inform your readers of incorrect information that was published in the Summer 2005 issue of *The Permanente Journal*. The article, *Meditation, Prayer and Spiritual Healing: The Evidence* by Marilyn Schlitz, PhD was biased and misleading. Her claim that the majority of studies on distant healing have produced significantly positive results negates the fact that most of these so-called studies represent absolute nonsense published in paranormal and alternative magazines. She fails to mention that Daniel Wirth, the lead author of more than a dozen of the most meticulously designed studies on distant healing, is now serving five years in federal prison for criminal fraud. Whether any of these studies were actually conducted is now open to question. My investigation of this bizarre healing research has been summarized in *Time Magazine* twice over the past two years. (Google search "Time Flamm" to get to these *Time* articles or use these links, www.time.com/time/columnist/jaroff/article/0,9565,660053,00.html, www.time.com/time/columnist/jaroff/article/0,9565,982245,00.html).

Although Dr Schlitz mentions Dr Harold Koenig at Duke University, she fails to mention that his group recently conducted a comprehensive nine-hospital multi-center randomized controlled trial of distant intercessory prayer. The results were crystal clear; distant prayer had no effect whatsoever.

I have been a physician with Kaiser Permanente for 23 years and served for most of those years as area research chairman, initially in Orange County and subsequently, in Riverside. Kaiser Permanente has a long history of conducting well-designed research and implementing best practices. It is sad to see Kaiser Permanente's hard-won reputation as an advocate of modern evidence-based medicine tarnished by the publication of superstitious nonsense in *The Permanente Journal*. The goal of the Symposium on Meditation, Prayer and Spiritual Healing was no doubt well-intentioned. Meditation and relaxation make scientific sense since physiologic principles do explain how the mind can effect one's own health. In contrast, distant healing is a mystical concept that defies all known scientific principles. In fact, the James Randi Foundation will pay one-million dollars to anyone who can show, under proper observational conditions, evidence of any paranormal or supernatural phenomena. (www.randi.org/research/). The fact that no psychic, medium, or faith healer has collected this money speaks volumes. I urge all physicians to visit Quackwatch (www.quackwatch.org/) to learn more about claimed methods of healing that are incompatible with established scientific concepts.

Bruce L Flamm, MD
Kaiser Permanente Riverside Medical Center

Editor's note: We have honored Dr Flamm's request that we publish his letter "... exactly as written ..." and have made no changes, corrections, or edits.

—Reply

To the Editor and Dr Flamm,

There have been ten published studies on distance healing (DH): half reported significance. The mantra study (Duke study Dr Flamm mentions) was not published at the time of my presentation or the write-up for your journal. Regarding Daniel Wirth, he was not the lead researcher and there is no indication that his crime relates to his study. I believe there are some very supportive data coming from the basic science work that I reported in my talk. Thirty-five formal studies have been published looking at distant intention on human physiology and have been reviewed critically and published in a leading psychology journal; overall the database provides support for the DH phenomena in a basic science context. Dr Flamm's letter reflects the strong viewpoints many have regarding this issue.

Marilyn Schlitz, PhD
Institute of Noetic Sciences



Dear Editor,

I just read the article on Sentinel Lymph Node Biopsy for Patients with Breast Cancer: Five-Year Experience (Perm J 2005 Winter;9(1):77-83). Figure 4 (Graph shows SLNB experience of KP surgeons) on page 81 is confusing—how can the X axis (number of false neg results per surgeon) (a value up to ~125) = 0-1% on the Y axis (false neg rate)? Should the X axis be labeled “number of sentinel node bx procedures per surgeon”? Or am I missing something?

Steven Thalberg, MD
Salmon Creek Medical Office
Vancouver, WA

—Reply

Dr Thalberg,

Yes, you are absolutely right. This is an editing error.

The graph plots number of SNLB procedures per surgeon on the X axis, against their false negative rate on the Y axis. For example, the surgeon who did 120 procedures (who happens to be Dr Godfrey's wife) had a near 0% false negative rate. The text in the last paragraph of the results section, which is to accompany this table is, however, correct. It appears that only the label of the X axis in Figure 4 is incorrect. The second editing error that was made was that Dr Holmes' and my e-mail addresses were incorrect (drholmesmd@aol.com, anjalisikumar@yahoo.com).

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