

Cancer Quacks and Their Remedies

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TO consider a request for a short paper on this subject is to be assailed by such questions as what constitutes a quack remedy and who are cancer quacks? In attempting to answer that, we run up against the very positive dictum that in the present development of our science the only effective remedy for cancer is to be found in surgery and its various allies, and if we accept that truth then another question presents itself: are all those who employ other methods, who exhibit remedies the potentialities of which are either negative or harmful, to be known as quacks? The tendency is, very naturally, to answer that in a loud affirmative but we must be careful in doing so, for within our own profession have been men who have developed substances and used them, no doubt in good faith at first, who unfortunately have built up the hopes of thousands of cancer sufferers, only to have them sadly dashed down again, sometimes with considerable psychic damage.

My first experience with one of these men was in the days of the Glover Cancer Serum, in a case which shows the effects, at first disastrously positive and then entirely negative, in two forms of cancer quackery. It was in my intern days in the Victoria General Hospital. A man in his fifties was admitted to the service of Dr. Hogan. He came from Cape Breton and presented one of the worst clinical pictures that I have ever seen. That statement need not be discounted either, on the ground of my medical youth and impressionability at that time, though those factors no doubt caused the picture of the case to be stamped indelibly upon my memory, and enable me to compare it correctly with cases of subsequent experience.

The condition had begun on the lip in the classical fashion as a scalliness which now was there and then was not, and which later remained and then became the "sore which would not heal". At this stage he went to the "cancer doctor" who said, "Yes, it's a cancer but I can cure it for you all right."

The 'cure' was begun according to the usual nefarious practice, with caustic paste, but the thing wasn't curing. Instead, secondaries appeared in the submental and submaxillary lymph nodes. Now the attempt to eradicate the primary growth with caustics was bad enough, but he didn't stop there. Disaster was courted by applying the paste to the lump in the digastric fossa. The perfectly sound skin with which this was covered was soon eroded through to the tumor, and that, with all restraint now removed, and reacting to the irritation that had been applied, grew more rapidly and more destructively than ever. The first application to the skin of the neck produced an ulcer almost as large as the palm of his hand, and as this developed an indurated edge, more paste was applied in the

vain hope of stemming the on-rushing tide of cancer cells. When the patient came to us, the lower lip was gone and with it the skin covering the left half of the chin and most of the skin and subcutaneous tissues of the left neck more than two-thirds of the way to the clavicle. The great vessels of the neck were visibly pulsating in the floor of the cavernous ulcer. The pain was awful, as was the odor of infected and gangrenous tissue, and the condition of the man was most pitiable.

It was recognized at once that as far as cure was concerned he was beyond ordinary medical knowledge and skill. At that time, however, Glover's Cancer Serum had just come out. It had not been submitted to proper medical investigation, but even lacking that, it was decided to give this man the benefit (?) of it. Through Dr. Glover's munificence it was available to us at \$50.00 a vial. That amount was provided by the hospital and the stuff procured. It was my fortune to give it to the patient and this I did with that unbounded faith and hope born of my unsophistication. We waited—waited long, and hoped, but only to experience disillusionment and the truth that resides in the saying "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." The psychological let-down for the man was worse to me than his death.

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Just over four years ago a man in his middle sixties was referred to me who when he came gave the following history: About nine months before, he had a small sore on his lower lip just about its middle, so, since the medical profession had so frequently failed to save people from dying of cancer, he went to a chiropractor. To all such conditions the versatility of the chiropractor was adequate, so treatment was begun. He "adjusted his spine", in reverse of the usual this time, by causing him to lie on an 'auto-condensation lounge' where he had him hold an electrode in each hand pointed towards each other and at the angles of the mouth. It was understood that these electrodes "created an electrical field about the growth which would cause it to regress!" After losing three months and six hundred dollars at this he became dissatisfied with the fact that the tumor kept growing away, so having been informed about a "regular cancer doctor" in a distant town, he betook himself thither. This "doctor" was a woman. Here he could receive treatment in complete trust and with every confidence. She was such a kindly, nice soul that no one could think of questioning either her veracity (I had almost written voracity) or her skill. Here the going was more satisfactory. The little sore would be made to disappear with her "plasters", only it had a very unpleasant habit of recurring again. Each time it recurred it was a little nearer the angle of the mouth and by the time six months were up she was quite unable to keep pace with it. He then submitted to a surgeon who felt that it could be excised, and this he did very neatly, but unfortunately it promptly recurred.

Here is a nice example of the effect of irritation upon the rate of growth of a tumor. Each time it recurred it was within a shorter time than had elapsed from the time before, and even though it was well excised

by the surgeon—there were no proper irradiation facilities near him—the effect of stimulation of growth received from all the earlier treatment was too great for even that to be effective, and it was back and growing rapidly in three weeks. When he came to me a further three weeks later the growth presented in the angle of his mouth, but it was also found to extend for 1½" along the inner aspect of the cheek. It was proved to be a squamous carcinoma and it was taken care of by large doses of implanted irradiation (radium seeds) and there is as yet no evidence of recurrence.

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If exploitation of the public is evil outside the profession it is equally evil, indeed it is more so, within it, and if we are to be consistent we must condemn both in similar terms. Nor in doing so are we casting any reflection upon that great body of Medicine which appreciates the nature of its vocation and works toward its ideals. Christianity is not discredited because Judas fell.

Despite this preamble however, and though it does fall under the postulate suggested in our first paragraph, one has still some hesitation in placing *Ensol* in this list. Yet here it is. At first when almost the whole medical world was damning it untried, we claimed that judgment should be suspended until the claims were properly substantiated or disproved. The principle 'audi alteram' is generally one to be respected, but in medicine, when honesty of purpose is not established by the submission of one's product to such proof of value as medical experience has found to be necessary, there can be no 'other side'. If, before value has been so determined, any product is released to the public, whether at fifty dollars a vial as in the Glover Serum case or at sixty a 'course' as in the case *Ensol*, and if later it is shown that the claims for it have not been substantiated, then the conclusion would seem to be inevitable that the case for quackery has been established. After a period of quiescence *Ensol* has within the last few days emerged again into the limelight, but again it has been in the lay press! Do you tell a man by the company he keeps?

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A woman walked into my office one evening some time ago complaining of a lump in her breast. This I examined. The usual questions were asked. Among them were the following:—

- (1) How long have you known that that lump was there? Answer: Six months.
- (2) And have you not done anything about treatment in all that time? Answer: Oh! yes, I have been having treatment for it almost ever since.
- (3) Treatment? Where have you been having it? Answer: I've been going to Dr.—
- (4) Who is "Dr.—?" I don't know any "Dr.—" Answer: Oh! he is a chiropractor.

- (5) What kind of treatment did he give you? Answer: Electrical treatment and massage.
- (6) *Massage?* To the lump in your breast? Answer: Yes! I had a lot of massage to it. Why not?

We train ourselves to the gentlest preoperative handling of breast tumors. We permit only the fewest possible manipulations by others, undergraduate or graduate, with a view to minimizing the dissemination of cancer cells. We believe that to be necessary. What is the view of the masseurs?

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Another type of practice in this field comes readily to mind. A man aged 61 was referred to me with cancer of the lip. He was brought from the train to my place in a taxi, and was so bad that he could be smelled almost before he could be seen. So bad was he that the taxi man who took him away again, after had put him in his taxi came back to me to know if there was any danger in transporting him and any danger to anyone in the house where he would spend the night.

He presented gross destruction of the lower half of the lip, and extending downwards on to the chin was a large fungating stinking tumor. It extended into the mouth filling the labio-gingival sulcus, and the inner aspect of the cheek presented several thick rather soft masses.

He gave a history of having had the condition for over two years and that six months after he first noticed it, he had a lot of violet ray treatments for it in a hospital. That failing, he went to a chiropractor. His treatment was equally worthless but was different, in that it was actually harmful. It consisted in harnessing energy which at least had the merit of cheapness, to wit, sunlight, and the apparatus for its use was a "magnifying glass" through which the sun's rays were focussed upon the tumor. Now musical souls may talk of "strained music", and sunlight is often described in semi-poetic language as filtering in, but it remains for our chiropractors to introduce the adventurous, if not the romantic idea, of applying the "beneficent health-giving rays of the sun, filtered and concentrated through a very powerful glass", to the cure of cancer. That might be a lovely idea if one could forget that through such a glass the so-called health rays are entirely filtered out, if one were not able to recall experiences from his unregenerate days when with a similar glass the sun's rays were deflected and focussed upon a schoolmate's neck, making him jump as if he were burned with a red hot needle and if one were not made to realize thereby how much an irritant it is; for it requires very little experience in cancer work to know that irritation is not only a producer of cancer but a speeder-up of its growth as well. Support for that is presented by this case wherein the patient volunteered the statement that the treatment was painful, and that the condition grew rapidly worse.

This man's condition was hopelessly incurable but we were able to do a good bit to reduce infection and odor, and to make his closing days more

bearable both to himself and to those charged with his care. He died in a few months. Cause of death? . . .

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Our latest tragedy, which came to our knowledge within the last two months, presents another and very glaring example of the use of caustic paste by a cancer quack operating in this province. It has so many features which parallel the first case cited here, that it would simply be repetition to state them. Just another poor fellow with his chances for cure stolen from him by a cancer quack, and with his remaining days made miserable by someone's misguided adventure without training into a highly scientific field. It is mentioned to bring us up-to-date, and to show that those atrocities are not taken from medieval history but that they are being re-enacted from day to day and that they are still going on among us. It gives me opportunity also to connect with it the fact that this is the kind of practice that we are virtually subsidizing, since at least one cancer quack receives a tidy sum each month through the check-off, in the office of one of our major corporations, for just such work.

Grasp the significance of that, gentle reader, and weep for our stupidity! For this is Nova Scotia, the province that has given so much brains to the rest of the Dominion and to parts beyond. Have we been *too* generous?

Ancient Medicine and Surgery

THE following receipt comes from a gentleman of undoubted veracity in Ireland, as Mr. Plunket's celebrated remedy for extirpating cancerous tumors. "Take crows-foot which grows in low ground, one handful; dog-fennel, three sprigs, both well powdered; crude limestone in powder, three middling thimbles full; white arsenic, the same quantity; all incorporated and made into small balls the size of a nutmeg, and dried in the sun. These balls must be powdered and mixed with the yolk of an egg and laid over the sore or cancer upon a piece of pig's bladder, or stripping of a calf when dropped, which must be cut to the size of the sore, and smeared with the yolk of an egg. This must be applied cautiously to the lips or nose, lest any part of it gets down; nor are you to lay it on too broad on the face, or too near the heart, nor to exceed the breadth of half a crown; but elsewhere as far as the sore goes. The plaster must not be stirred until it drops off itself, which it will in a week."

LONDON PRACTICE OF PHYSIC
(date unknown).

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In all dropsies the diet should be dry and solid; the liquids should be sparingly used; and these should consist of good old rich wines, or medicated beer, in order to strengthen the solids and to promote the renal discharges.

MARRYAT, 1777.