

## **Dr. Oz Says ‘We’re Not Going Anywhere’**

*By: Dr. Mehmet Oz, TIME.com*

I started my show to give TV audiences advice on how to find a good life, not to practice medicine on air. This means celebrating them wherever they are in their search for health, and offering tools to nudge them along in the right direction. In the same hour-long show, a board certified doctor will discuss cancer followed by a celebrity sharing their personal weight loss story and concluding with an audience member learning to manage their money better. I don't expect all of my colleagues to understand this marriage between conventional medicine and the broader definition of wellness that the show pursues. I expect and respect the criticism of colleagues who struggle with my approach and I try to improve the show accordingly.

But I was surprised by a brazen note as I entered the operating room at New York Presbyterian/Columbia University this week. A small group of physicians unknown to me were asking my dean to revoke my faculty position for manifesting “an egregious lack of integrity by promoting quack treatments and cures in the interest of personal financial gain.”

The dean politely reinforced that the academic tradition of all institutions protects freedom of speech for their faculty, and I assumed the matter was over. The surgery went much better than the media fury around this letter. Within 12 hours, most major media outlets had published articles on the note, many mistakenly stating Columbia faculty were trying to oust me. Who were these authors and why were they attacking now?

With a few clicks and some simple searches, a remarkable web of intrigue emerged—one that the mainstream media has completely missed. The lead author, Henry I. Miller, appears to have a history as a pro-biotech scientist, and was mentioned in early tobacco-industry litigation as a potential ally to industry. He also furthered the battle in California to block GMO labeling—a cause that I have been vocal about supporting. Another of the letter signees, Gilbert Ross, was found guilty after trial of 13 counts of fraud related to Medicaid. He is now executive director of American Council on Science and Health, a group that has reportedly received donations from big tobacco and food and agribusiness companies, among others. Another four of the 10 authors are also linked to this organization.

I have spent my entire career searching for ways to lessen the suffering of my patients. The best and safest paths have generally been the traditions of conventional medicine. They are tried and true, well funded, and fast. But there are other routes to healing that offer wisdom as well, so I have been willing to explore alternative routes to healing and share any wisdom that can be gathered. I have done this throughout my career as a surgeon, professor, author and, of late, as a talk-show host. Despite being criticized, I want to continue exploring for myself and my audience. Why?

Because in some instances, I believe unconventional approaches appear to work in some people's lives. They are often based on long-standing traditions from different cultures that visualize the healing process in very different ways from our Western traditions. They are aimed at chronic conditions like lack of energy, fogginess, or moodiness—which are frequently overlooked or under-treated by conventional practitioners. They are also often inexpensive. With limited profit motive, companies understandably do not wish to invest significant resources into proving benefit, so these unconventional remedies do not undergo rigorous clinical studies. So we have practitioners recommend therapies that they find effective in their own practices. When I interview an unusual or interesting person on my show, often it's expository or out of fascination—not to tell my audience they should see a psychic instead of their primary care physician.

It's vital that I drive the following point home: My exploration of alternative medicine has never been intended to take the place of conventional medicine, but rather as additive. Critics often imply that any exploration of alternative methods means abandoning conventional approaches. It does not. In fact, many institutions like mine use the names "complementary" or "integrative" medicine, which is also appropriate.

This can lead to confusion and irritation when analyzed by conventional physicians. For example, another daytime TV show and mine were recently noted in a *BMJ* article for only having proof for half of what we shared with the audience. A similar figure is often used to approximate the amount of randomized clinical trial data underlying conversations in physician's offices across America. This reflects that natural gap between what is proven in clinical trials and the needs of our patients.

The *BMJ* authors were correct in reporting that advising people with the flu to rest or cough into the crook of their arms is completely unproven. But major organizations like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) give rational advice of this nature that isn't directly linked to a research paper. When there isn't data, we rely on the non-literature-based guidance of the CDC, the National Institutes of Health, the Food and Drug Administration, the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as specialty professional organizations and experts. (The authors of the *BMJ* piece later acknowledged being "disappointed that the overwhelming commentary seems to be that our study somehow proves that Dr. Oz or The Doctors are quacks or charlatans or worse. Our data in no way supports these conclusions.") The reality of being a healer is that we won't ever know everything about our chosen field, which is what attracts many of us to medicine in the first place.

So I have traveled off the beaten path in search of tools and tips that might help heal. These explorations are fraught with their own unique peril. For example, my voyage into the land of weight loss supplements left me in a very unsavory place. I wish I could take back enthusiastic words I used to support these products years ago. And I understand the criticism I've received as a result.

I discovered problems in the promising research papers that supported some products; the products themselves were often poor quality; and scammers stole my image to promote fake pills. So I have not mentioned weight loss supplements for a year and have no plans to return to that neighborhood.

Other times the topics are controversial, but are still worthwhile, like our campaign supporting GMO labeling. And this brings me back to a motive for the letter. These doctors criticized my “baseless and relentless opposition to the genetic engineering of food crops,” which is another false accusation. Whether you support genetically engineered crops or not, the freedom to make an informed choice should belong to consumers. The bill in Congress this month proposing to block states from independently requiring labeling offers a coup to pro-GMO groups.

As a scientist, I am not that concerned about GMOs themselves, but I am worried about why they were created. Highly toxic herbicides would kill crops unless they were genetically modified, but with the genetic upgrade, these plants can be doused with much higher doses, with potential complications to the environment. The WHO believes that glyphosate is “probably a human carcinogen.” Perhaps we are all showing “disdain for science and evidence-based medicine,” but I would argue that unleashing these products creates a real-time experiment on the human species. Sure, we will eventually know if these pesticides are a problem, but at the expense of the pain and suffering and disease in real people. I owe my kids more. And so do you.

I know I have irritated some potential allies. No matter our disagreements, freedom of speech is the most fundamental right we have as Americans. We will not be silenced. We’re not going anywhere.