

Letters

Support for alternative medicine

Obviously, Wallace Sampson ("Alternative reading," SN: 3/4/95, p.131) has not been reading SCIENCE NEWS or any medical journal regularly. If he had, he would have noticed the many articles outlining the benefits of vitamin and mineral supplements in the prevention and treatment of a variety of diseases.

No doubt he also suffers from an intermittent blindness that does not allow him to read in the same sources the less frequent articles on the uses of a variety of herbs.

*Ronald Greenburg
Vancouver, B.C.*

In keeping with Sampson's warning about the "dangers" of using plants in the healing of disease and the (implied) safety of pharmaceuticals, we should all be gratified to know that drug companies are presently scurrying to extract beneficial chemicals from soy and cole vegetables so that we will not have to continue running the risk of "uncontrolled dosages" in our orders of broccoli and tofu, Hunan style.

*Burt Rashby
Topanga, Calif.*

I recommend *Peterson's Field Guide to Medicinal Plants*, by James A. Duke and Steven Foster, and *Tales of a Shaman's Apprentice*, by Mark Plotkin. Both detail current and potential benefits of plant medicines.

*M. Tupper
Newcastle, Maine*

To round out your recommended reading list, I suggest Omar K. Garrison's seminal work, *The Dictocrats*, and a work whose author I have forgotten, *In the Name of Profit*. These two tell the horror stories of e\$tabli\$hment medicine far better than I could.

*Edward G. Robles Jr.
Franklin, N.C.*

Racketeering in Medicine: The Suppression of Alternatives, by James P. Carter, is a must for all those who have been victimized by our profit-driven medical industry.

*Richard Averett
New Berlin, N.Y.*

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, there are over 6 million adverse drug reactions resulting in over 100,000 deaths per year in the United States from prescription medication.

Congress' Office of Technology Assessment has concluded that over 75 percent of what is practiced as medicine is without any kind of scientific basis or has never been proven safe or effective in clinical trials.

Public Citizen (the Ralph Nader organization) has concluded that at least 60 percent of prescription drugs are unnecessary.

*Charles Davy
Phoenicia, N.Y.*

Contrary to Sampson's bald assertions, commercial herbal products are among the safest of all consumer products, as measured by deaths, and many of them are now offered in standardized potencies. Deaths from concentrated or spiked ma huang products only underscore the stupidity of America's drug-oriented, quick-fix mentality (have the Chinese encountered this problem in thousands of years of use?) and the tragedy of policies that keep the public ignorant of alternatives to profitable, but life-threatening, medical interventions. Please don't scuttle Michael T. Murray's excellent book.

*Laughing Water
Helena, Mont.*