

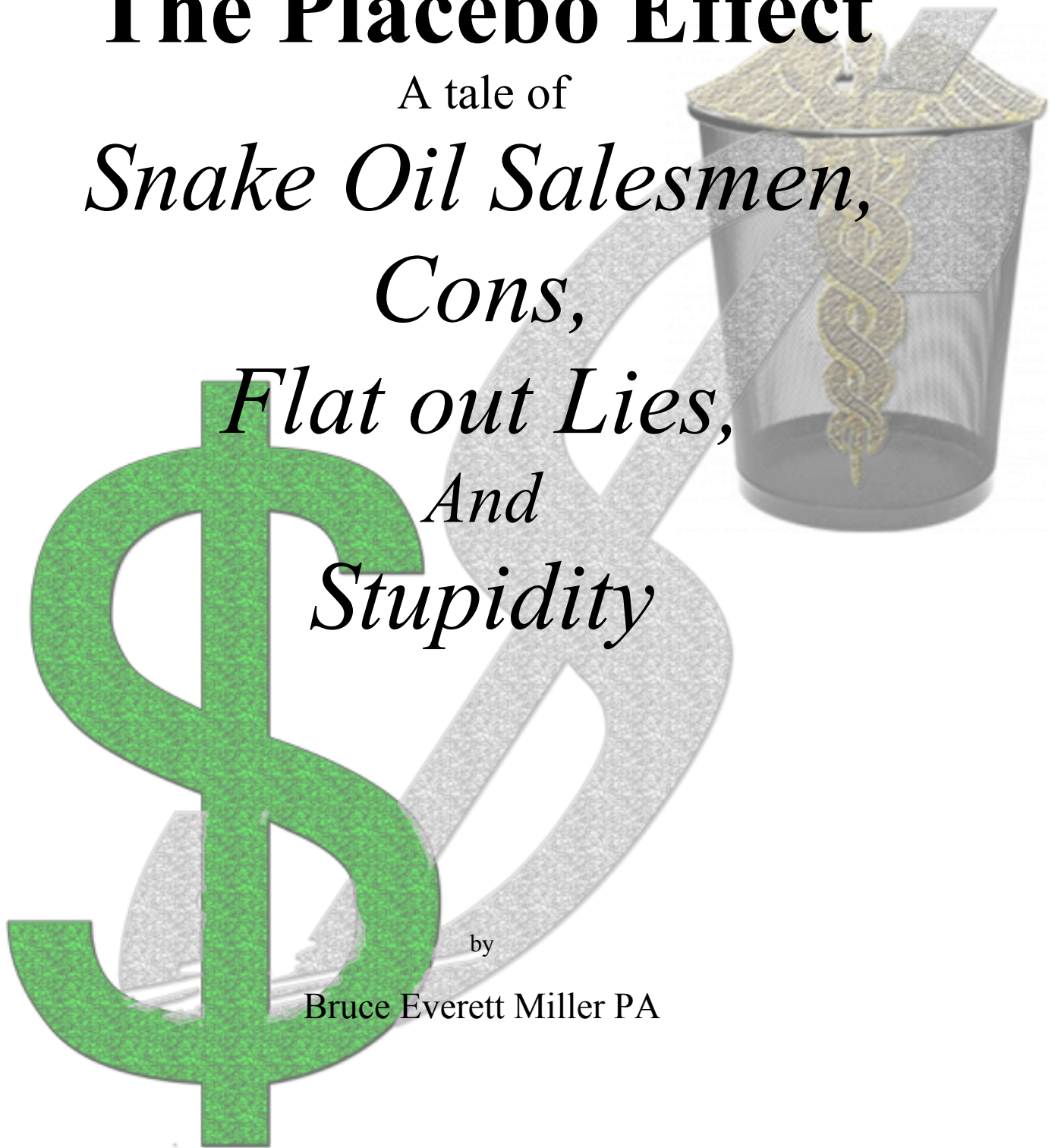
The Placebo Effect

A tale of

*Snake Oil Salesmen,
Cons,
Flat out Lies,
And
Stupidity*

by

Bruce Everett Miller PA



The Placebo Effect

The Past and Present story
of Snake oil Salesmen,
Placebo's, Scams, and Quacks

AND HOPEFULLY
how to tell what is real from what is not

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Further, it is your responsibility to discuss any and ALL medications - including herbs, that you take, with your healthcare professionals -- BEFORE taking any of the advice contained within this book. Literally I do not know your medical situation nor the medications you take. This book is only an outline of the dangers out there ... be safe .

Please check any questions about medications with someone who knows [PROFESSIONALLY!]

Also I wish that you would check things out before accepting any information in this book. Because I relied on many sources, for this information it is possible that I could be WRONG Or even that the data has changed since I started working on this project. So take everything as a starting point but for you own safety check any information out with a reliable VERIFIED source.

I like to say that I practice militant mysticism.

I'm really absolutely sure of some things that I don't quite know.

Rob Bell

Introduction

This book started when I was doing additional research for my book on Chi. I frankly became fascinated by the history and tales of Placebo's and trickery that have occurred throughout the ages ... Chi is far from being the only type of trickery played on the willing masses.

I have been fighting mysticism and pseudo science in my hobby of Martial arts for decades. And like everybody, I had heard stories of some of the snake oil salesmen of history but I was unaware of how much of this has gone on and how much of it still goes on today!

Unfortunately Snake oil products have been with us forever. One has to realize that the use of placebo effects, are nothing new. Even Homer (The ancient Greek poet, not Homer Simpson), suggested that the same drug could be more or less effective depending on the caregiver, and also depending on if the patient considers the therapist to be an authoritative person or gifted with specific abilities. HE also said that wounded heroes would have a better outcome if Helen of Troy treated them personally than they would otherwise.

So, we all know that it has been going on forever, but if you, like me, are fascinated by this twisted history then hopefully you will enjoy this collection of stories about snake oil salesmen and other Placebo salesmen. AND the whys of what are wrong with their stories.

BTW the hard part was not finding enough material for this book, the hard part was determining how to LIMIT what I put in.

There is so much material [in varied and related subjects] t and so much variations of deliberate malfeasance and just stupid things, that I had to break the subject down into THREE books ... even then I am going to have to limit what I put in, just for size considerations.

However I will try to include the ways and the reason why people get conned so MAYBE I can prevent someone else from being conned.

So my second companion book: **Just plan Dumb** covers stories of things that are / were dumb but is not really about placebo effects.

The third Book in this series, Hyper Vitaminosis: The poisoning of America, will cover the Truth about Vitamin and mineral supplements, and the damage that they cause, and WHY the BS they claim is bad for you. [Including references so you can check up on what I say. Which is always a good practice!]

With that I will note that I have included webs sites - like ones from the FDA and the FTC that give far more information than I can here. Frankly I do not see the point of just coping this information- although I may make statements pointing to some of the more obvious significant points.

And you might find it interesting to LOOK UP Quackery -in Wikipedia,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quackery>

However here, for this book at least, I will **try** to stick to things, which are placebo effects.

I hope you enjoy!

Bruce

Definition and a little history:

Snake oil was an expression that originally referred to fraudulent health products or unproven medicine but has come to refer to any product with questionable or unverifiable quality or benefit.

The common theory is that the name originated in the Western regions of the United States and is derived from a topical preparation made from the Chinese Water Snake used by Chinese labourers to treat joint pain. The preparation was promoted widely available in 19th century United States, by travelling salesmen and troupes of travelling entertainers who often used accomplices in the audience to proclaim the benefits of the preparation.¹

By extension, the term **snake oil salesman** came to mean someone who knowingly sells fraudulent goods or who is himself or herself a fraud, quack, charlatan, and the like. The term has gone out of popular usage but the idea remains alive and well ... and unfortunately the mantle (of deception) has been taken up by a whole new breed of charlatans.

The snake oil peddler became a stock character in Hollywood Western movies: a travelling "doctor" with dubious credentials, selling fake medicines with boisterous marketing hype, often supported by pseudo-scientific evidence. To increase sales, an accomplice in the crowd (a shill) would often attest to the value of the product in an effort to provoke buying enthusiasm. The "doctor" would leave town before his customers realized they had been cheated.

Please note that occasionally some of these claims did have an element of truth to them and I will try to acknowledge that also. However please note that usually the reasons (that the medicine worked) were not the ones the con artist claimed and real medicine eventually figured out what the benefits and actions are. That usually took considerable time

But any legitimacy to a cures working usually causes two simultaneous events 1) it stimulates the development of a new series of legitimate drugs and 2) it always sets off a parallel set of

pseudoscientific claims and drugs being sold on the market claiming to do an even better, even miraculous job, of curing people.

The bottom line is that both herbal medicines and fake cures are BIG business. That is the point of all these claims. According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, in 2007, \$14.8 billion was spent on non-vitamin, non-mineral, so called natural products, such as fish oil, glucosamine, and Echinacea - and part of that 14.8 billion was the \$4.4 billion that was spent on herbal supplements. Not all of that is bad, for some of these products do work, but many just do not and some are actually dangerous.

We will get into this and more in a bit.

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FOR WHAT IT IS WORTH

Note: Despite what you may have heard about old remedy's being patented they were not.

Compounds of the 1800s and early 1900s, were trademarked but not patented. It may seem like a mute point but it isn't ... a trademark protects the name ... not the ingredients - most of which the manufactures would not divulge.

NOTE: Such medicines were also frequently called **nostrum remedium** ("our remedy" in Latin). Such products probably sounded more profound / legitimate with a Latin name. [You can call a skunk a rose, but it won't smell any better?]

JUST PLAIN STUPID

First: Defining The Con

The word *charlatan* comes from the word *ciarlare*, meaning to prattle, or an indiscreetly talkative person. Possible the word comes from the word *Cerretano*, referring to a resident of the village Cerreto, in central Italy called Umbria, known for its quacks.

Charlatan came to be used to refer to the sellers of medicines who might advertise their presence with music and an outdoor stage show, a person practicing some form of some form of pretense or deception or other similar trick in order to obtain fame, or money.

The best known of the Parisian charlatans was a man by the name of Anthoine Girard, who was known by the street name **Tabarin** (c. 1584 – August 16, 1633). Tabarin set up a stage in the Place Dauphin, Paris in 1618.

He was known for amusing his audiences in the Place Dauphine by farcical dialogue with his brother Philippe (as the character Mondor). He would then reap a profit by the sale of quack medicines, which he did for several years

The fact that these cures did not work seemed to be no detriment. For many of these performers following Tarbins' example, would travel the continent performing to attack audiences then make their profits by the sale of cure all medicines, quickly departing town when sales died up.

By Europe was not the only place such salesmen made their mark.

The term took on the definition of the traveling troupes of performers in the USA in the 19th century. So popular was the idea that even Mark Twain wrote about a true believer (Aunt Polly) – in his book in 1876 titled **The Adventures of Tom Sawyer**. Tom tries out a "cure for warts" with a dead cat by accompanying Huckleberry Finn, to the graveyard at night.

In addition 1936 W. C. Fields even produced a film called Poppy: about a **Western** frontier American **snake oil salesman** and his claimed miraculous cure for hoarseness.

Lets, be clear here though. Some times the con man actually believes what they are pushing. In fact there is an old saying that "You don't have to believe in what you are selling to be a good salesman, but it helps" which definitely applies to some of the greatest snake oil salesmen in history.

Social Pressure?

It is well known that people are influenced, by the group they are with at the moment. Thus groups gathered to watch traveling troupes of performers were often "spiked" with watchers that would be call out and recommend the product being hawked. This is still being done with the game being changed to the idea that popular people (stars, etc) now are the shills for the people that hawk stuff.

So why do people do this stuff? (lie make false claims etc?)

These companies lie because they want money and figure that a lie is the fastest easiest way to get it. Real research takes time (see the Chapter High N) and costs significant money.

Furthermore- at least in the USA there is the constant threat of lawsuits against registered manufactures of Medications.

This threat does not exist to corporations that can pull up roots and change their entire name and internet address in minutes. Even if you can find them tracking down the people behind them takes considerable time and money. Getting them into court is even harder. Frankly it takes the resources of the Government to be able to do this (see the Chapter on Just plain Stupid for more details of why this isn't being done)

So it comes down to the question of whether what is being sold is actually science or is it ignorance scam or bureaucratic compliance with those making huge amounts of money selling this stuff.

Think that cannot be the case... read further.

[Now I know this book is being read by international readers and that these laws and condition only apply in the USA but they do represent the conditions – varied of course- that exist all over the world]

LAWS that allow the CON/ SCAMS!

One would think that it would be illegal to sell something that didn't work or that you can't make claims that something works unless you have research to back it up.

Not true - remember the chapter on the bad N

Frankly there are TWO advocates for the consumer. The First is the FDA and the second is the FTC (Federal Trade Commission)

BAD LAW!

Back to the point, there used to be stronger laws. However president Clinton signed the law that changed this in 1994 (PL 103-417). Called the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994. The law defines dietary supplements as **products intended to supplement the diet and that they are NOT DRUGS** thus locking the FDA out of regulating them, unless there is CLEAR indication of fraud or of making claims to treat a specific diagnosis (something which a drug would do). [Again the DSHEA did not change the law or regulations regarding "health claims,"].

The law lets supplements sellers imply things that they do not have to prove as long as they do not come out and say that it specifically treats a disease or condition.

President Bill Clinton, (on signing DSHEA into law), stated that "After several years of intense efforts, manufacturers, experts in nutrition, and legislators, acting in a conscientious alliance with consumers at the grassroots level, have moved successfully to bring common sense to the treatment of dietary supplements under regulation and law."

He also noted that the passage of DSHEA "speaks to the diligence with which an unofficial army of nutritionally conscious people worked democratically to change the laws in an area deeply important to them" and "In an era of greater consciousness among people about the impact of what they eat on how they live, indeed, how long they live, it is appropriate that we have finally reformed the way government treats consumers and these supplements in a way that encourages good health."

Furthermore the DSHEA grandfathered all dietary supplement ingredients marketed in the United States before Oct. 15, 1994. They no longer could be touched!

So when a statement of nutritional support appears on a dietary supplement label, all the DSHEA requires is for the label to display prominently the following disclaimer: **This statement has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.** That is it. No proof – no studies, nothing except a dodge.

The DSHEA stated that supplements should be made with good manufacturing practices – meaning safe and hygienic processes. HOWEVER there are no inspectors in foreign countries to verify the manufactures statements that their claims that this is being done. There is nothing that forces other governments to inspect these manufactures!

It is true that the FDA and the FTC REALLY have done what they can. They has challenged the claims of many manufacture – mostly of claims like being fat free or healthy.

They have spent considerable time and effort to remove illegal copies of medications, blatantly false claims and dangerous hormones from the Internet marketing (marketed in the USA – a significant distinction!)

However there are just way too many claims and products for the FDA to investigate. And as soon as they force one site or seller to close down they just change their electronic address and set up shop again and again.

Check it out do a search yourself ... you can buy just about anything over the internet.

Flatly without a law banning all such products unless they are cleared FIRST the FDA (and FTC) are playing a bad game of catch up with No chance what so ever to be able to keep up with the Con artists.

DANGER!

This is CURRENT (as of April 2013)

As bad as the situation, is it could get MUCH WORSE. Congressmen RAND PAUL has advocated for HR 3394 that advocated for something called the FREEDOM OF HEALTH SPEECH CARE ACT. [Leave politics out of it this is just a bad idea]

HR 3394 - The Freedom of Health Speech Act - Amends the Federal Trade Commission Act to prohibit considering the content of any publication as advertising regulable under the Act unless the content is intended by a product seller to promote that product's sale and the content includes the name of the product, an express offer to sell, and a purchase price. Prohibits considering any content excerpted in whole or part from a peer-reviewed scientific publication as advertising regulable under the Act.

[Meaning that manufactures can take snippets out of studies without using the whole truth ... or limitations of the study!]

Prohibits the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) from beginning an investigation of possible false advertising regarding a dietary supplement or a dietary ingredient unless the FTC already possesses clear and convincing evidence that the advertisement is false and misleading. Places the burden of proof on the FTC to show, by clear and convincing evidence, that an advertisement for a dietary supplement or dietary ingredient is false, that the advertisement actually caused consumers to be misled into believing to be true that which is false, and that, but for the false advertising content, the consumer would not have made the purchase at the price paid.

Requires the FTC, if a claimed health benefit is alleged to be false advertising, to additionally establish, based on expert scientific opinion and published peer-reviewed scientific evidence, that the claim is false.

Are you kidding me ... you would have to PROVE that advertisings claims are false before you can challenge it?]

This farce claims that the FTC (federal TRADE COMMISSION – the one that tries to make all

manufactures tell the truth in advertizing) should not be able to stop a manufacture from making claims about their product (even if they had no proof that it worked), UNLESS THE FTC PROVED it did not work or was false. Furthermore they had to give the Advertizing a warning and allow them to modify their claims. [So they can keep making a dangerous drug .. they would just have to modify their claims ... are you serious?]

Remember the chapter where I explained how long it takes to do good research ... now the Government would have to spend time and money – lots of both to do research just to prove a drug was bad BEFORE they could make manufacture take it off the market. Making sellers prove what they say is completely off the table.

Remember **Laetrile** is a chemically modified form of amygdalin, a naturally occurring substance found mainly in the kernels of apricots, it really contained a small amount of a substance that can/ will be converted to cyanide in the body, and several cases of cyanide poisoning were linked to the use of Laetrile.

According to this bill we could not stop or say anything against advertizing laetrile until AFTER WE PROVE that it is harmful ... meaning until AFTER PEOPLE HAD DIED ...

Also if manufactures make a phony claim that is on the edge (of the truth) and then they are finally called on it they can make a slight adjustment in the ad and not be fined. Yet the impression from the first phony claims is still out there in the public mind. They would not have to retract the claims just modify future claims ...

One simply cannot blame the FDA or the FTC ...

Frankly, in my opinion, some people are hell bent on suicide and believe that anyone or anything that does not share their view is deceiving them... Other people are willing to ride the train of popularity no matter whom the train runs over. In this case Ron Paul is the culprit ... don't take my word on this ... please ... look it up !

Conspiracy nuts of the world unite! Panders are there to get your vote – at any cost!

One difference between man and machine is that the machine is usually quiet when well oiled.

“HIGH N”

Learning How to tell Real from BS!

I wish this chapter was easy. I wish that I could give you a simple, easy, perfectly valid way to ensure that what you hear is true or to tell if it is not. However, as you are well aware, it doesn't work that way! So we have to get this chapter covered to be able to proceed to why many of the claims you hear are less than, shall we say, “full disclosure”.

Frankly I hope this chapter will promote that you become a skeptic!

First off N refers to Number. Which is pretty simple. BUT in terms of validity a Drug study MUST have LOTS of people enrolled to determine if there is going to be problems with the general public. This is because people are not all the same. And the inside there are more significant differences than on the outside. Particularly the Liver is a thing that is different. The organ for breaking things down that can be harmful to the body. This includes MANY drugs we take. But how a drug / chemical is broken down varies from person to person. [For those interested look up the Cytochrome system of the liver. Very complicated but also interesting - at least for those of us whom have studied pharmacology].

Back to the N. Not only do you have to have a high number of people in your study you also have to have significant number of days. One advertiser says that in "a clinical study of 7 days" they had no ill effects. WTF - 7 days ... you will not note non-allergic or lethal side effects in most studies for at least 6 weeks. So literally they could have done everything else right but that so called "study" was worthless - and their add is therefore BS.

Personally I think the 6 weeks that many studies do is way too short. it should be at least 3-6 months. But Studies cost money, big money, so 6 weeks is what they do and they are SUPPOSED to review

any data brought in from the public after the drug has been on the market at specific times... AND most do that, which is why sometimes d you hear a drug being pulled from the market after it has been released for only a short while.

But what I have been referring to above is GOOD studies. And there are a LOT of "drug Studies" Ou there that are not good. There are many that determine the conclusion they will see before they even commission the study!

To get the results they want they can and do alter all sorts of parameters, like not taking patients tht have ever had other drugs like the one being tested, only using a small N, setting criteria that excludes any "complaint that does not match exactly what they want to hear. There are so many ways to cheat that it is ridiculous.

AND then there are the studies that are not even double blind. Single blind they call them. These studies the person conducting the study knows which person getting the the real dug and which ones that aren't. Of couse this influences the results. But it is a "Study" and they will claim that a "study indicated"xxx

The only thing you should believe - is that it is a lie!

MORE Definitions:

So first off, I have to define my terms. I use the term scam artists to loosely group all those NON LICENSED pseudo-scientists who use substandard research methods, un-calibrated or un-standardized self built equipment. I can build any thingamabob in my basement and claim it measures all sorts of things... but unless I can prove it then the so called results are meaningless. Yet that is exactly what some of these con artists do.

Eample: There are big companies that go around offering HEALTH SCREENS. And they get people to givem them money to put htem in a machine and hten screen them for common problkems, like high blood prssure and canceer and lung disaese. The Problem, is that their machines [no matter how clsoe they resemble real medical eauipement] are NOT claiibrated with universal medical

standards. So letterally their results are worthless. And I know for a fact that I have had patients that came in worried because of results they have told them. Luckily when they were tested by calibrated real machines there was no evidence of the reported problem.

Now as a backup to my claims I will noted that Insurance companies will NOT pay for these so called health screens. They know they are worthless. However these companies still amke biog money talking people, especially seniors into forking over their hard earned fixed incomes to do these screens. Unfortunately these companies skirt the law by only making SUGGESTIONS in their findings they don't make official diagnosis so they are still leagl - even though not ethical

I also not that for some reason there are some licensed people who practice energy-based techniques that are not totally accepted by the Standard medical community. Yet these practices are both accepted and LEGAL. And as long as they stay in the bounds of what hey are licensed to do they are noted to help people. Now these techniques have been around for centuries and have survived simply because they seem to work, - even though we do not have a perfect MEDICAL explanation for why. A couple of examples I would give you of such practitioners are the Chiropractor and the Shiatsu practitioner.

However one IMPORTANT thing that I must point out is that these people are (or should be) all LICENSED practitioners. State medical boards have scrutinized all their training and methods and approved the treatments that they offer.

So, while neither conventional western medicine nor I agree with their base theory of why they claim things work, their techniques do seem to work. Regardless of the base theories they use which have never been PROVEN tby research studies.

The same studies however should be noted - do not show that these techniques do any harm to the patients either! Which is why they are Professionally icensed to being able to provide their treatments.
