

New Age Medicine: *Caveat Emptor*

By Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon
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PRINCIPLES OF DISCERNMENT:

How can a person tell whether a doctor is practicing scientific medicine? Informed and attentive listening is important. Ask the doctor to explain things in simple English; critically think through what a doctor says. If you believe it is necessary, do not hesitate to bring up the subject of New Age medicine. What does a doctor think about it, and why? Has a doctor ever considered adopting New Age medical treatments? Which one(s), and why? What is the doctor's religious worldview? Does he have a spiritual leader or guru? Does he follow an Eastern religion or practice a form of Western occultism? Is he frustrated from some of the problems in conventional medicine and looking for alternate ways of treating his patients? Has a personal crisis in his life led him to explore alternate spiritual lifestyles?

Unfortunately, the occult nature of New Age treatments may be camouflaged by scientific, neutral, or spiritual-sounding euphemisms. Because of this, it is often necessary to investigate the background of a given treatment thoroughly before placing one's physical or spiritual health at risk. Certainly anyone who suspects any unusual or unorthodox method or therapy should investigate the matter before treatment begins or continues.

How did the practice originate? Who was its founder? What was his worldview and spiritual orientation? Is the method or practice accepted in the medical community, and if not, why not? Does a method require a psychic sensitivity to operate successfully? Is there any evidence to substantiate that this method really functions on the basis of its stated principles? If it claims to function on spiritual or mystical principles, what is the worldview tied to those principles, and how are they related to the occult? Does accepting the method *require* adopting a new worldview? Does the method require faith: Does it "work" only if one believes in it?

In Reisser, Reisser, and Weldon's *New Age Medicine*¹, a number of principles are discussed for determining which therapies or techniques should be avoided. We have reproduced these principles below, added others, and provided illustrations with various New Age therapies. In recognition of the ancient Latin phrase "caveat emptor," that is, "let the buyer beware," they are listed as "caveats."

Caveat #1. Beware of therapies that are energy based and claim to manipulate invisible or mystical energies or that rely on psychic anatomies. Examples are acupuncture, muscle testing, ayurvedic medicine, reflexology, and color therapy. Be aware, also, that a practice which appears entirely innocent, such as passing a hand over the body (as in therapeutic touch), may not be innocent at all. Therapists who claim to manipulate invisible energies may harm a person spiritually by such a method.

Caveat #2. Beware of those who seem to use psychic knowledge, power, or abilities, as in clairvoyant diagnosis, psychic healing or surgery, crystal healing, therapeutic touch, radionics and psychometry, channeling energies, and shamanistic medicine. Those having psychic abilities are ultimately linked to the spirit world, and their methods and practices are consequential.

Caveat #3. Beware of a practitioner who has a therapy that almost no one else has heard of. We could cite something called Terpsichoretrancetherapy or TTT. This is a

“hypnopsychotherapeutic” method which claims that “the ritual kinetic trance existing in primitive Afro-Brazilian spiritual [spiritist] sects may be used therapeutically,” noting that “under [both] TTT and during a ritual [spirit] possession, the subject undergoes [allegedly therapeutic] regression.”

Caveat #4. Beware of any technique that is promoted before it has been validated by mainstream science. This includes New Age medicine in general. To accept such practices is unwise because responsible persons do not publicly promote techniques whose value and safety is undemonstrated. Such practices are typically quack methods whereby people lose their money through experimentation and do not get better.

Caveat #5. Beware of anyone claiming that the therapy will cure almost anything, as in color therapy, acupuncture, homeopathy, and some forms of chiropractic. Those who maintain that the therapy will cure almost anything will probably cure almost nothing.

Caveat #6. Beware of someone whose explanations are bizarre or don't make sense, as in astrologic medicine, behavioral kinesiology, homeopathy, and color therapy. A practitioner of astrologic medicine may tell you that the influence of Jupiter or Pluto has affected your nucleic acids. A homeopath may claim that the more diluted a “medicine” is, the greater its power to heal. A color therapist may ask you to drink water bathed in “yellow rays” to cure indigestion. (Never hesitate to ask your doctor to explain in simple English, and to offer scientific evidence, why the therapy works on the basis of its stated principles.)

Caveat #7. Beware of therapies whose primary “proof” is the claims of satisfied clients. Again, this includes New Age medicine in general. In fact, the only “evidence” we have that New Age medicine works comes from testimonials which are better explained by other means. Of course, satisfied clients (at least initially) are found in everything from con schemes to witchcraft, but that hardly validates them. Therapies can seem to work and still be false.

Caveat #8. Beware of therapies that rely upon entering altered states of consciousness, such as hypnotic regression, therapeutic touch, meditation, and visualization techniques. Altered states of consciousness are notoriously deceptive, unreliable in health matters, and frequently open the doors to spiritistic influences.

Caveat #9. Realize that a practitioner's sincerity is no guarantee of scientific or medical legitimacy. This holds true for all practitioners, including Christian ones. Even noted evangelical health therapists and pastors have employed or endorsed questionable or discredited techniques.

Caveat #10. Beware of any method that has been scientifically disproven, such as iridology, homeopathy, applied kinesiology, astrologic medicine, radionics, and many chiropractic claims.

Caveat #11. Beware of a therapist or physician who claims to diagnose or treat patients on the basis of “intuition.” In New Age medicine, “intuition” is often a euphemism for psychic and spiritistic inspiration or ability.

Caveat #12. Beware of spiritual imperialism. Avoid any therapist who thinks his or her methods are specially connected to God. For example, many of these therapists will attempt to treat clients psychically without their knowledge or permission. Some nurse practitioners of therapeutic touch have admitted this. Such therapists may assume the divine “right” to do so because “divine” intuition tells them such treatment is “needed.” Also, it is always wise to make certain a physician has attended an accredited medical school. This is no guarantee that he or she will practice legitimate medicine. But it will

weed out those who are medically untrained, to help you determine whether the therapy offered is commensurate with their educational background. And be wary of a practitioner who will not directly answer your questions or seems evasive. Even some physicians are closet spiritists or psychics. When directly asked if they are practicing energy manipulation or have spirit guides, they will evade the issue in order to retain respectability and credibility. Or they will redefine their occult beliefs and practices so that they sound scientific. Continue to pursue the issue until you have a definite answer concerning their orientation.

Finally, if the buyer is to beware, the seller of questionable therapies should also beware. Those who deal in the realm of health, not to mention the human spirit, have a responsibility to others not to promote therapies which may endanger the physical, emotional, or spiritual health of their clients. Those who offer therapies that are not scientifically established, and which may harm their patients, need to realize they can be held legally accountable for their actions.

Footnote:

1. Paul C. Reisser, Teri K. Reiser, John Weldon, *New Age Medicine: A Christian Perspective on Holistic Health*, Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988, see pp. 147-52.