

# THE NCAHF BULLETIN BOARD

JULY / AUGUST 2001

***The NCAHF Bulletin Board is sent to members and media recipients only. It is intended to stimulate and aid in activism against health fraud, misinformation and quackery at the local, state & national levels.***

## NEW NCAHF TASK FORCE INITIATED

Cindy Province, RN ([cindypro@mo.net](mailto:cindypro@mo.net)) is the coordinator of a new NCAHF Task Force that will evaluate the claims made by anti-vaccination activists and expose how promoters of unproven methods of healthcare threaten community health by discouraging use of standard vaccines.

## AVMA REVISES CAM GUIDELINES

The Executive Board of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) gave its acceptance on April 9<sup>th</sup> of a statement of new, rational "Guidelines on Complementary and Alternative Medicine." The new statement replaces guidelines adopted in 1996 that were notoriously promotional of the use of "alternative" methods. The new guidelines are published in the July/August issue of *Skeptical Inquirer* as a sidebar to "Confronting Veterinary Medical Nonsense: A Report from the Trenches" by Robert Imrie, DVM, the coordinator of NCAHF's Veterinary Task Force. From its inception, the Veterinary Task Force set out to convince AVMA leaders to revise the 1996 statement. It mounted an intensive letter-writing campaign early in 1998. Task Force member Dave Ramey, DVM eventually gained a seat on the nine-practitioner AVMA committee that re-evaluated the statement.

As described in another sidebar to Dr. Imrie's article, NCAHF's Veterinary Pseudoscience Task Force recently commissioned what may be the first-time-ever translation into English of key sections from various ancient Chinese veterinary texts, none of which deal with dogs and cats. Dr. Imrie found no evidence in the translated texts of a Chinese tradition of veterinary acupuncture.

The Task Force has offered accurate information regarding unproven "alternative" therapies at major veterinary conferences across the country. Dr. Imrie's article describes misinformation about such therapies promoted at recent conferences of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine and the AVMA. Dr. Imrie commented on a presentation about "A traditional Chinese medical approach to hip dysplasia" by an author of a text promoting acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine for dogs and cats: "Her presentation, in essence, dealt with 'a traditional Chinese medical approach' to a disease traditionally unrecognized by Chinese medicine in a species that, traditionally, the Chinese did not treat."

Dr. Imrie and Dr. Ramey are co-authors of "The Evidence for Evidence-Based Medicine" published in the Spring 2001 issue of *The Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine and Aberrant Medical Practices*. They conclude in their paper: "Claims that conventional medicine is not widely based on evidence should be rejected, as should logically fallacious arguments based on such claims."

## DOG FANCIER SUPPORTS NCAHF

When Donna Svabik's beloved Bullmastiff, Sonny, developed osteogenic sarcoma, she pored through Internet forums and chats to seek advice. She found the Canines in Crisis Web site which promoted a radical diet of megadoses of various vitamins, exotic

seaweed supplements, herbs, and extracts. "The statements made about this diet were tremendously encouraging," said Donna. "The diet had already been 'tested' and 'proven' to shrink, melt, and regress actively developing tumors up to 65%."

But her veterinarian explained that the claims made were unfounded. She received the same message when she contacted Quackwatch and NCAHF.

After joining the e-mail Health Fraud Discussion List, Ms. Svabik became even more skeptical. "Whenever I came across alt-medders who stood upon a soap-box declaring to have an answer for cancer, I sent a picture of Sonny's worst oral tumors," said Donna. "I always wrote them: 'This is cancer. Take a DAMNED GOOD LOOK. Do you really believe for ONE moment you have anything for sale that can address what the best possible protocols couldn't.' I have yet to get a response from any of them."

"Sonny was a magnificent dog who saw me through so many bad times. He was a beloved pet who was taken too soon from my life. No living being deserves to go in the manner he did. The sight of Sonny's tumors will haunt me for a long time to come. He passed on February 12<sup>th</sup>, but his memory lives on." Pictures of Sonny before his illness are at [http://members.aol.com/\\_ht\\_a/don2eypup/myhomepage/profile.html?mtbrand=AOL\\_US](http://members.aol.com/_ht_a/don2eypup/myhomepage/profile.html?mtbrand=AOL_US).

After joining the altsvetskept Internet forum, Donna learned of the work of Dr. Imrie and Dr. Ramey of the NCAHF Veterinary Task Force. "I have yet to see others in the field of veterinary medicine who have been as successful as either of these professionals in debunking fraudulent claims in animal care," said Donna. "These two professionals have inspired me to help their cause by making monthly contributions to NCAHF designated specifically for the Veterinary Task Force. I know my monies will be put to good use toward informing the media of dubious methods and practices in the animal world."

Donna's interests in NCAHF extend beyond the Veterinary Task Force. She took up weight training to increase her strength and endurance because she had been a battered wife and "decided never to allow anyone to do this again to me."

"Back in 1985, when I first began my exercise lifestyle, I was curious enough to look into the various supplements and preparations endorsed by the 'top' fitness gurus," said Donna. "No product I ever purchased delivered the promises made, and soon I ceased purchasing them. I have been blessed with good genes and have never been considered overweight. Fortunately, I am physically able to put myself through the rigors of iron-pumping. Any progress I've made since 1985 have been through my own exertion and a sensible and balanced diet, not through supplements."

"I rely on NCAHF's expertise to help me debunk much of the misinformation about 'trapping fat,' 'burning fat,' or building muscles. NCAHF has one overwhelming advantage over supplement pushers: facts."

Donna has pledged to make monthly donations via <http://s1.amazon.com/paypage/P3HC7HUZYVURJS/> to support the

general operations of NCAHF. "I appreciate that NCAHF has made it convenient to support its important work," she said.

Donna Svabik's e-mail signature reads: "Skepticism travels the highways of information...Blind faith leads to a dead-end" and "Endorsing with Pride: Quackwatch, NCAHF, and The Veterinary Pseudoscience Task Force of NCAHF."

### NCAHF BOARD MEMBERS SPEAK OUT

- Saul Green, PhD offered a scathing critique of contemporary "alternative" methods such as extravenous ozone and gaseous ozone for people with AIDS, "metabolic therapy," and "antineoplaston" treatments to an overflow audience at the Director's Colloquium at Los Alamos National Laboratory on June 6<sup>th</sup>. A critique by Dr. Green of the rationales claimed for the autogenous vaccine treatment of cancer proposed by Virginia Livingston Wheeler was published in the Spring 2001 issue of *The Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine and Aberrant Medical Practices*.
- Clara Lawhead, MS, RD; William M. London, EdD, MPH, Tim Gorski, MD; and Robert S. Baratz, MD, PhD, DDS spoke at the National AIDS Health Fraud Task Force Meeting in San Antonio, Texas, June 9-11th. FDA has joined with 21 states and territories to form the AIDS Health Fraud Task Force Network, a grassroots cooperative striving to curb AIDS fraud through various information programs. The NCAHF speakers see important opportunities to work with Task Force Network members to develop anti-fraud initiatives. The Task Forces have already developed hotlines, workshops, conferences, and advocacy sharing as an alert mechanism to new fraudulent product promotion. Members of the Task Forces include persons living with HIV/AIDS, community-based organizations, treatment advocates, health care practitioners, educators, federal and state government officials, and local health care departments. NCAHF President William M. London has joined the New Jersey AIDS Health Fraud Task Force. For more information about the AIDS Health Fraud Task Force Network visit <http://www.fda.gov/oashi/aids/eval.html> or call the Network's coordinator at the FDA Betty Dodson (1-888-INFOFDA or 301-827-2913).
- A report on NCAHF's June 23<sup>rd</sup> "Healthcare Beyond the Fringe" conference at the College of Saint Elizabeth is scheduled for the next *NCAHF Bulletin Board*.

### FDA AND FTC ACT AGAINST COMFREY MARKETING

The US FDA asked makers of dietary supplements containing comfrey to withdraw their products because the pyrrolizidine alkaloids in comfrey cause liver damage and possibly cancer. The Federal Trade Commission announced that Utah-based Christopher Enterprises, Inc. agreed to a preliminary injunction that bars the company from marketing comfrey-containing products for "internal uses or on open wounds." The FTC said that the company promoted comfrey products as a cure for asthma, tuberculosis, broken bones, herpes, and other maladies. [Reuters report, 7/6/01.]

### GUILTY PLEA IN SALE OF COLLOIDAL SILVER

In June the Federal Trade Commission settled fraud charges against several companies that sold colloidal silver products over the Internet. A bit player in the colloidal silver scam, Steve Tondre of Rancho Palos Verdes, California, promoted a product called EXP over the Internet for \$50 per 16-oz. bottle as an AIDS cure. EXP contained mostly tap water laced with microscopic particles

of silver. Tondre claimed EXP enhanced the immune system and fought pathogens by increasing oxygen levels in the blood. Federal prosecutors charged Tondre with two felony counts that carry up to three years in prison. But after the FTC made its settlement with the larger companies in June, federal prosecutors reduced the charges against Tondre to four misdemeanor counts for selling a mislabeled dietary substance. Tondre, an electrical handyman, pleaded guilty in July and will likely face probation instead of prison. [Reuters report, 7/10/01.]

### NEW "WELLNESS AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE" B.S.

The Department of Behavioral Sciences at Johnson State College in Johnson, Vermont has announced a new bachelor degree program in "Wellness and Alternative Medicine" (WAM). According to the Johnson State Web site: "The WAM program is among the first of its kind in the country to offer undergraduate students a science-based education in wellness and alternative medicine."

The science base in the WAM program appears to be the introductory science courses in the curriculum. However, a science-based education in "alternative" medicine should prepare students to determine whether claims made by proponents of methods promoted as "alternatives" are consistent with principles taught in introductory science courses and supported by scientific evidence. Promoting such a science-based education does not appear to be the point of the WAM program. A press release for the program notes: "Career opportunities for our graduates include: Wellness Program Assistant, Wellness Center Personnel, Management and Technical Assistants in the Health Spa Industry, Staff for Holistic Practitioners, Health Food Store Industry, Organic Farming, and Herbal Product Manufactures [sic], Counselors, Acupuncturists, Chiropractors, Naturopathic [sic], Meditation Instructors, Yoga Instructors, Homeopathic and Ayurvedic Consultants." The WAM program includes a pre-clinical specialty track to prepare students for admission to naturopathy or chiropractic colleges.

### FAMOUS ASTROLOGER'S THESIS QUESTIONED

More than 400 sociologists signed a petition asking the president of the Sorbonne to make an independent evaluation of the passing grade given sociology PhD student Elizabeth Teissler's defended thesis on "The Epistemological Situation of Astrology in Relation/Rejection of Postmodern Societies." The French Association of Scientific Information assigned a group of scientists and social scientists to review the document.

Critics contend that the thesis is not a work of social science. "There is no trace of empirical fact or research method," wrote Bernard Lahire, a sociologist at the École Normale Supérieure de Lettres et Sciences Humaine in Lyons. "The idea hammered home from beginning to end of the document is that astrology is the victim of domination. That science, which is renamed 'official science' or 'monolithic thought,' oppresses astrology."

Tessier is the weekly horoscope columnist for a popular television guide, the author of books on astrology, and the astrologer to French president François Mitterrand.

[Eakins, E. Star wars: Is astrology sociology? *The New York Times*, June 8, 2001, p. B9, B11.]

### CORRECTION

In "OIG CALLS FDA OVERSIGHT OF DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS" in the March/April 2001 *Bulletin Board*, the figure for the dietary supplement industry's estimate of sales should have been \$16 billion instead of \$16 million.