

Do You Believe In Magic? The Sense And Nonsense Of The Alternative Medicine

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Introduction

The name of the author, Paul Offit, is fairly popular in the autism communities. He worked a significant time in disproving the concept that autism is a cause of vaccination. He works as a Chief of Infectious Diseases at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and is also a co-inventor of a vaccine that guards newborns against rotavirus. A number of books have been written by him, including one that discusses autism, known as "Autism's False Prophets," and there's also one on the anti-vaccine movements, which consists of great segments on autism, namely "Deadly Choices, How the Anti-Vaccine Movement Threatens Us All." His new book "Do You Believe in Magic? The Sense and Nonsense of Alternative Medicine" talk about the increasing use of alternative medicines and its adverse effects on health.

The book "Do You Believe in Magic?" was written by the medical specialist Paul A. Offit. It provides a contemptuous exposure of the alternative medicine industry and reveals how certain famous treatments are significantly useful because of the palliative reaction, most of them are costly, ineffective, and even fatal. The doctor and author of the book are convinced that alternative medicine can really be fatal and dangerous to our health. This unregulated industry does not prove its assertions nor accept the risks. Offit draws a fine line between sensibility and nonsense using the dramatic and true life stories. He shows why any treatment, whether alternative or conventional, should be inspected. He is also of the opinion that some nonconventional techniques can be advantageous, in certain situations, exceeding treatments and therapies provided by traditional practitioners. Dr. Offit is straightforward enough in his stance and says, "There's no such thing as alternative medicine. There's the only medicine that works and medicine that doesn't."

Summary

"Do You Believe in Magic?" presents both sides of the story. It gives the pros and cons of alternative medicines. He starts by exemplifying the advantages of using alternative medicine. For instance, in his book he presented the success stories of different supplements practitioner such as faux cancer therapist Stanislaw Burzynski and chelationist Rashid Buttar. He also says that any substance or technique from the old traditions must be advantageous, and natural things are good for health. Dr. Offit presents the claims regarding alternative medicine to be true, but as soon as he starts going on the opposite side, one gets the whole image. The subject of vitamins has a lot been emphasized in

the book and also by the media. The author remarks how the industry got support and encouragement from the legislation which overlooked its harmful consequences. The book convinces us that people who take supplements tend to live shorter than those with the same condition who do not take supplements. (Offit)

Dr. Offit makes an in-depth analysis of the alternative medicine industry and those who support it. It is quite evident from the title of the book that it contains serious criticisms regarding vitamins, supplements, and herbal treatments. He states, "Treatments for illness or for prevention of illness are either proven through clinical studies or they are not." Or it can be stated that the notion of an alternative medicine does not have any significance; either it is or it's not. Also being a marvelous storyteller, Dr. Offit exposes certain fables regarding the alternative medicine in a highly comprehensible manner. He opinionates about the ineffectiveness of these so-called medicines and according to him, the great issue lies in the fact that they are measured differently than drugs.

All types of claims can be made by these supplements which are not permitted in case of drugs. This difference was imposed on the regulators by a compliant Congress in order to permit the national regulation. The celebrity endorsers are taken on by Dr. Offit who are always supporting these alternatives. One of the most beloved and recognized television physicians, Dr. Oz, was the target of Dr. Offit's criticism for advertising unclinically evident alternatives. According to Dr. Offit, celebrities are great people for making sales and claims without any proof. These supplements are in fact dangerous for one's health as said by Dr. Offit. The extra dosage of vitamins becomes the cause of disease. Though they are present on the shelves of a GNC store, it doesn't mean they are safe for intake. Most of these supplements consist of similar contents and ingredients as those present in the prescription of drugs, and also without the confirmation of dosage or purity of the contents. The celebrities who discourage vaccinations are most criticized by Dr. Offit. Not recognized for her medical history, Jenny McCarthy came up with a decision that autism is caused by vaccines. She also started a campaign to make parents aware of the harmful effects of vaccines.

Hence, avoidance of some common vaccines took place due to which there has been a resurgence of instances of childhood diseases. There's no proof that autism is an outcome of vaccination, but that does not discourage the celebrity inclination toward alternative cures. Apart from the harmful effects of the supplementary treatments, Dr. Offit states one more disadvantage, which is the wastage of money. Some of these treatments include chondroitin for knee cartilage, mega doses of vitamin C for colds, and saw palmetto for prostates. Some which do work are folic acid for preventing birth defects, and calcium and vitamin D for healthy bones.

The author gives the answer to the question raised that why do people rely on these alternative medicines, and the answer is the placebo effect. He convinces that when people are told what these medicines can do, they take it and it works. The real cures can't be replaced by the placebo effect. Dr. Offit also gives an instance of Steve Jobs who was suffering from a controllable pancreatic cancer. He took the supplements a year due to which his cancer spread and became inoperable.

Analysis

The analysis of Dr. Offit is well-researched and well-written. He convinces us that whatever medicines one takes must be clinically proven. His claims and stances are reasonable enough to support his pieces of evidence, but he neglects the use of alternative medicines. We have advanced technology that helps us identify the reality of things and recognize the effectiveness of any medicine or treatment. So why not people use these methods to become aware of the true contents of food or medicine being ingested. The author sensibly questions the experts as to why these alternative medicines are viewed as medicines at all. His opinion is justified that there is no sense in the term 'alternative medicines.' Medicine is either a medicine or it's not. Anything which provides a cure and not damages to one's health is a medicine, otherwise, it's not.

We know that all the medical treatments are for the purpose of establishing physical transformations that can be accurately measured such as lowering of temperature or fever, bringing about weight gain or loss, shrinking tumor, etc. But there's a factor of 'feeling better' which is dealt with by the alternative medicines since the whole treatment didn't succeed or complete. The research on alternative medicines or treatments must not be based upon the differences among alternatives and the conventional methods, but it must focus on the pros and cons of the treatments being applied. Otherwise, we are risking "believing in magic".

Conclusion

Offit is not against the cure or healing of people due to the alternative treatments. Rather, he is of the opinion that suffering should not be the reason to abandon science. He says that when any treatment or a medicine is not proved to work effectively, its usage must be stopped. A theory is discarded when rejected repeatedly. On the other hand, natural remedies such as those taken out from foxglove (digitalis) or willow leaves (aspirin), are actually operative, they should be recommended. Offit says, "There's a name for alternative medicines that work, it is called medicine."

The book is highly recommendable for those in search of the reality of alternative medicines and treatments. Apart from the truth it offers, it also points out the significance of researching and examining the reality of the things we consume. The book serves the purpose of spreading awareness among the people of the society regarding their health and the issues related to it. We are always advised to take medicines with the consent of the doctors, but the doctors who permit the use of alternative treatments must also provide us with clinical evidence about those treatments or medicines. The book advises that we should not risk our health by believing the magic of these alternative medicines. Rather, open our eyes to the truth and reality so that we don't suffer from more health damages. The author opens up two ways for us to choose. He describes both positive and negative aspects of ingesting alternative medicines and applying alternative techniques. It's now up to the people to decide.

Works Cited

Offit, Paul A. Do you believe in magic? The sense and nonsense of alternative medicine. Harper Collins, 2013.