

White House Commission Pushes Quackery

By ACSH Staff — April 2, 2002

The National Council Against Health Fraud, Inc. (NCAHF) has concluded that policies prescribed in the report issued March 25th by the White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy (WHCCAMP) would lead to widespread adoption of unproven, disproven, and irrational methods and would cost the American public billions of dollars and thousands of human lives.

The 1910 Flexner Report set the standards for medical education. The WHCCAMP report does the exact opposite by outlining the agenda for establishing quackery.

The Commission was established two years ago during the Clinton Administration to make recommendations "assuring that public policy maximizes the benefits to Americans of complementary and alternative medicine." After two years of study it provided a blueprint for a costly bureaucracy to promote "CAM" (complementary and alternative medicine), which it failed to define and which functions as a marketing term for quackery. CAM would be integrated in all federal programs, medical schools, and the entire educational system of the USA. James Gordon, WHCCAMP's chair, maintains that the US government should create a special office for CAM that would ensure that it is spread widely.

The WHCCAMP Report is vague, long, unfocused, and rambling. The Commission's failure to critically analyze CAM reflects the zealotry of its chair and many of its members. Two Commissioners Joseph Fins, M.D., and Tierona Low Dog, M.D. issued a clear and concise dissent that was buried in the report as Appendix G. The Report was apparently modified at the last minute by Gordon to try to blunt some of the impact of the dissent. The modifications were made without review by the Commission.

NCAHF has issued a position statement (at <http://www.ncahf.org/pp/whcpp.html> ^[1]) and has posted a paragraph-by-paragraph analysis (at <http://www.ncahf.org/whc/00.html> ^[2]) as well as links to additional information about WHCCAMP and its members, most of whom are philosophically and economically aligned with the so-called "CAM" movement. Some, for example, are associated with homeopathy and its discredited, pre-scientific notion that a substance diluted to infinitesimal proportions, where no molecules of the substance are left, can transfer healing powers to water. Simple common sense shows that this cannot and does not occur. Other Commissioners have claimed that pushing on an outstretched arm can allow a practitioner to diagnose hidden infections at distant sites and that this technique should be widely adopted as a standard practice.

Gordon's advocacy of reshaping medicine to include numerous CAM practices without regard to their scientific defensibility appears to be the major weakness and cause of the failure of the Commission. Gordon played a strong role in the selection of the Commissioners, its charge,

activities, and agenda. When asked why the Commission didn't find any forms of CAM lacking, Gordon replied that that was not its job. He was quoted on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* as saying that there are thousands of therapies and that studying each to find out which ones work and which ones don't is a major project. He calls for more funds to be spent on this endeavor, without regard to which methods even make sense. Commissioner Fins dissented, saying, "Science doesn't work that way."

Given limited resources to improve health care in our society, diversion of federal spending to study illogical and ill-conceived ideas makes no sense. Many CAM practices and methods are illogical, unsafe, and never likely to be effective, a point made in the dissent by Commissioners Fins and Low Dog. The pathway for funding research has always been based on testing viable hypotheses, not all hypotheses regardless of whether they are viable.

Following the Commission recommendations, anyone could create a "new" therapy, whether it be catching moonbeams or adding spices to coffee enemas, and call it CAM. Gordon's plan would create a perpetual motion machine for funding research on such nonsense. For ethical reasons, most CAM therapies cannot be used in human subject research since such studies fail to meet the requirements of the Belmont Report, the template under which human research must be done in the USA, a system that requires clearly defining the nature, scope, and risk-benefit assessment criteria for any experiment.

The WHCCAMP Report is carefully contrived to suggest that CAM is close to the mainstream and that its critics are on the fringe. The opposite is true. The National Council Against Health Fraud (NCAHF) promotes reliable information backed by experimentally derived data on safety and effectiveness. It studies issues and generates reports so that individuals can make informed rational choices. The WHCCAMP represents quackery.

The recommendations in its report go far beyond any data or findings of the Commission and also go beyond reason and rationality.

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