Nonsense About Science From Celebrities: We Were There First

By Ruth Kava — December 15, 2017

Back in 2008, we published the first edition of *Celebrities VS Science*, our effort to combat scientific fraud by exposing, and correcting, the nonsense promulgated by some well-known celebrities, such as Gwyneth Paltrow. Unfortunately, the drip, drip, drip of unsubstantiated 'cures' and 'treatments' by some celebrities haven't stopped. These folks leverage their fame into assumptions that they know what they're talking about.

Ross Pomeroy, writing in Real Clear Science, endeavors to understand *Why Do So Many Celebrities Ignore Science?* He points out that while it's easy to find celebrities who push pseudoscience — Gwyneth Paltrow, Jessica Alba, Robert De Niro among others — it's harder to find those who provide scientifically sound information. A few he lists include Natalie Portman, Tom Hanks, Alan Alda and Penn Jillette.

After interviewing several folks who have investigated the reasons, Pomeroy presents some possible reasons for celebrities' adherence to pseudoscientific beliefs (this assumes, of course, that they believe what they're saying).

These include:

Since celebrities' fame often depends on their appearance, they're more likely than most to follow any product that promises to improve that — wishful thinking, perhaps?

The fact that celebrities are more narcissistic than the general population, especially female celebrities, is another possible reason for these beliefs. Pomeroy says
If celebrities are more likely to be vain, egotistical, and overly confident in their knowledge and abilities, then it follows that they will be more likely to believe what they want to believe regardless of what scientists and experts say, especially if they have adoring fans supporting them.

And yet another explanation might be existential guilt — celebrities might not believe they deserve all the perks of their positions and thus try to be more valuable by finding ways to "treat or cure" some of the ailments that afflict mankind.

Finally, Pomeroy points out, it just may be that at least some celebrities are just as gullible when it comes to fake cures as the rest of the American population. After all, would homeopathy and acupuncture be so popular and genetic modification be so feared if most people had a good scientific basis for their beliefs?

And to add just one more rationale for a celebrity to foster belief in an unscientific nostrum, we can always look for the money. Maybe pushing a homeopathic "cure" will generate some bucks for the celebrity who endorses it — are there any licensing agreements for the use of someone’s name?

While it's somewhat disheartening to see how the celebrity endorsement 'business' has grown since we first pointed it out, the fact that at least some well-known folks are pushing back does provide some hope. Wouldn't it be great to look for celebrity endorsements of pseudoscience and not be able to find any? Maybe that's another Christmas gift to ask for!