Modern Medicine Bullies Indigenous Knowledge, Journal Argues with Straight Face

By Alex Berezow, PhD — May 29, 2018

In our postmodern society -- where truth is relative, "fake news" is prevalent, and scientific facts are just an opinion -- it shouldn't come as a surprise that modern medicine is facing a backlash.

Evidence-based medicine, which is supported by a bedrock of biomedical science, literally has saved the lives of billions of people. Yet, modern medicine has been sustaining an assault from multiple fronts in recent years.

One front has fought against long-standing practices of public health meant to prevent disease, such as vaccination, pasteurization, and water fluoridation. A second front rages against those responsible for treating disease, such as medical doctors and pharmaceutical companies, who have been accused of conspiring against patients, for instance by withholding cures for cancer.

A third front wages battle against agricultural biotechnology, the goal of which is to increase the safety and reliability of the food supply while minimizing environmental impact.

And now, a fourth front has opened: A war on biomedical knowledge itself.

Modern Medicine Bullies Indigenous Knowledge

Modern medicine, often referred to as Western medicine, did not get off to a great start. We practiced bloodletting. We said disease was a punishment from God. Other times, we blamed witchcraft. Until relatively recently, we performed lobotomies and endorsed eugenics.

But, we learned. We subjected our beliefs and practices to scientific scrutiny. Those that failed, either on scientific or ethical grounds or both, were rejected. Today, we still aren't perfect, but we
strive to implement therapies that are evidence-based and in the best interest of the patient. This is, without a doubt, the best and only way to practice medicine.

However, evidence itself is under attack. A new paper [3], published in the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine, argues that modern medicine has bullied indigenous knowledge, and it needs to be protected. The authors write, "[T]raditional medicine treatments and practices have long been subjugated, devalued, co-opted, and in some cases decimated across the globe within the context of European colonization." Furthermore, the authors lament that this issue "frequently goes unaddressed."

There's a reason for that: It's historical revisionist nonsense. When the British colonized what became the United States, they brought all their kooky 17th Century medical practices and theories with them. Benjamin Rush, one of America's Founding Fathers, summarized [4] the cutting-edge therapies of the time as "bloodletting, sweating, physicking, diuretics, vomiting and blisters." In other words, whatever "knowledge" colonists had at that time was probably not much better than whatever indigenous peoples were practicing at the time.

Therefore, it is entirely absurd to conclude that colonialism had any role in "devaluing" local traditional medical practices. Stone-cold facts, generated by modern science and clinical trials, are why we can embrace Western medicine and reject most traditional medicine as the garbage that it is -- including traditional medicine that originated in Europe.

**The Trouble with Multiculturalism**

It's not a coincidence that this paper was published in 2018. Our global society is in the midst of a postmodernist surge, and we find ourselves debating the merits and demerits of multiculturalism. A diversity of human culture makes life far more interesting, but we are fooling ourselves if we conclude that all cultural practices are equal in worth. They are not.

We don't need to think long and hard about this to reach that conclusion. Some cultures practiced ritual human sacrifice. Other cultures, to this day, preach ethnic and racial superiority or practice female genital mutilation. If it is right and proper to denounce these cultural practices (and it is), then it should also be right and proper to denounce bogus "remedies" that don't actually work. That's not racism or colonialism; it's scientific progress.

Of course, we probably shouldn't expect a journal dedicated to promoting witchcraft to understand that.