Mark Hyman, the 'Dr. Oz' of Nutrition, Says Food Is Killing People Like the Holocaust

By Alex Berezow, PhD — October 14, 2020

Dr. Mark Hyman, who pushes alternative medicine and nutrition pseudoscience, compares processed food to the Holocaust, fabricates statistics, and takes a swipe at the American Council on Science and Health. That was inadvisable.

It's difficult to out-Oz Dr. Oz, America's Quack, who has raked in giant piles of money by promoting pseudoscience on his TV show. But at least one person comes perilously close: Dr. Mark Hyman.

Hyman is the "Dr. Oz" of nutrition. He embraces legitimate science if and only if it suits his bottom line. Otherwise, he's promoting junk science and magical thinking. To get an idea of the sort of nonsense that he spews, his website features an interview with the Food Babe, as well as his infuriatingly stupid quote, "Food isn't like medicine, it is medicine." The comma splice just makes me that much angrier.

The Many Lies of Dr. Mark Hyman

Hyman made a recent appearance on the Rubin Report, which is hosted by conservative commentator Dave Rubin. Hyman took the inadvisable step of taking a cheap shot at ACSH, so we thought we would reciprocate by fact-checking some of the interview. (Note: The interview is
55 minutes long, and my head would explode if I actually listened to all of it.) Buckle up.

"I became a doctor and kind of got indoctrinated, literally, and became very focused on traditional, good medicine, but I realized the limits of it. And then I got sick myself and ended up having to fix myself using functional medicine.

Wow, the bullsh** is strong with this one. He claims that doctors are being force-fed lies in medical school and that the real truth is what he calls "functional medicine" -- which is just a different term for alternative medicine, holistic medicine, integrative medicine, or whatever rainbow-and-unicorn term these quacks prefer. I generally frown upon Wikipedia, but the first sentence in its entry on Functional Medicine is too good to pass up: "Functional medicine is a form of alternative medicine that encompasses a number of unproven and disproven methods and treatments."

Six out of ten Americans have a chronic disease. It kills 11 million people a year from food.
His first statistic is true, but the second is a gigantic, whopping lie. (See figure taken from the CDC [4].) Considering that chronic disease includes everything from heart disease to Alzheimer’s, there’s a lot of territory to cover. Poor nutrition is simply one risk factor among many. Other risk factors are genetic or environmental. So, to single out food as the primary cause of chronic illness is just plain wrong.

Also, I have no idea where he gets his statistic that 11 million people die from food every year. Each year, about 2.8 million Americans die from all causes. Globally, there are about 56 million deaths from all causes. Hyman just fabricated the 11 million number, which he then refers to as "like a Holocaust" (at the 6:00 mark). Twinkies, Nazis? Basically the same thing.

"If I really want to cure my patients, I have to step back and look at the big picture of what’s wrong with our food system, the impact it's causing on disease, on our economy, on social justice issues, poverty, mental health, kids' academic performance, national security, environment, climate. It's all one problem that is predominantly driven by our food."
Food is not the root cause of national security problems, let alone every other problem on the planet. Hyman sounds like that guy from The History Channel who blames everything on aliens. Anytime somebody fingers a single boogeyman for causing every disease and problem known to mankind, this is a giant red flag indicating quackery.

"Most states have obesity rates over 40%.

Obesity is a substantial problem in this country, but this is another made-up statistic. Only one state (Mississippi) has an obesity rate over 40%, according to the CDC [5].

"We have one in three federal dollars that are spent on Medicare."

Yet another made-up statistic. Here are the federal outlays for 2019 [6]:
Medicare cost $644 billion. With $4.4 trillion in spending, that means the federal government spent about 15% of its budget (roughly 1 in 7 dollars) on Medicare. If we're generous and include Medicaid, that is 24% of the budget (about 1 in 4 dollars). Again, Hyman just fabricates numbers out of thin air. To add yet more absurdity, Hyman claimed a moment later that 80% of the spending is unnecessary because it's caused by food. Right, if only everybody ate broccoli everyday, nobody would have cancer or dementia.
"They create front groups... to confuse consumers saying, for example, that pesticides and high fructose corn syrup and trans fats and smoking are not bad for you, like the American Council on Science and Health."

By "they," I think Hyman is referring to aliens or food companies. Anyway, Hyman is lying again. ACSH has always been anti-smoking. Always. In regard to trans fats, we're sort of ambivalent on the issue. Dr. Chuck Dinerstein wrote [7] in 2018 that the FDA has largely eliminated trans fats from the American diet, but there doesn't seem to be much of an impact on cardiovascular disease. Pesticides are safe if used at appropriate doses (which they are). (Besides, plants make 99.99% of the pesticides [8] we consume.) And when analyzed chemically, high fructose corn syrup is basically honey [9].

Don't ever listen to Mark Hyman.

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