Ben Carson Bungles Again, Treating Cancer with Supplements

By Gil Ross — October 7, 2015

Those of us who believe in science-based medicine were extremely concerned when Republican presidential candidate Dr. Ben Carson shared his flawed views about vaccinations during the last nationally televised debate, which reached more than 20 million viewers. From our perspective, that was very disconcerting in its own right.

But now we're learning that that wasn't the first time the retired surgeon badly strayed from sound science.

In a recent Wall Street Journal article it was revealed that when "[f]aced with a prostate-cancer diagnosis more than a decade ago," Dr. Carson, the newspaper's lead reads, "consulted an unusual source: the medical director of a Texas firm that sells supplements made of substances such as larch-tree bark and aloe vera extract." In fact, after taking a regimen of supplements, the Journal stated citing a YouTube video of his 2004 remarks, "'[w]ithin about three weeks my symptoms went away, and I was really quite amazed.'"

The infomercial-like talk occurred to a conclave of salespeople and staffers for Mannatech, Inc., a purveyor of supplements. The video was removed from the corporate website last week, shortly after, according to the Journal, the paper made inquiries about it.

In his talk, Dr. Carson introduced the topic of prostate cancer by describing his own early, mild symptoms, and how his evaluation by Dr. Pat Walsh at his own institution, Johns Hopkins, suggested prostate biopsy. (Dr. Carson was Chairman of Pediatric Neurosurgery there until he retired in 2013, at age 62.)

The diagnosis was "extremely malignant cancer," Dr. Carson stated. He told of his MRI, which (apparently) showed extensive metastatic spread to his spine, and his resignation to his fate. Somehow, news of his cancer got out, and he received many suggestions for treatment, one of which was for glyconutrients from Mannatech's CEO, a "Dr. Reg," which he decided to take.
"My symptoms began to disappear almost immediately," Dr. Carson asserted in the video. He decided, however, to also have surgery, again by Dr. Walsh.

Amazingly, the cancer was actually confined to the prostate and he was cured: the "metastases" in his spine were actually an artifact. And as Dr. Carson continued, he assured his audience at the time, that he remained on the Mannatech supplement regimen.

We here at the American Council have expressed our disdain for "dietary-nutritional supplements" on numerous occasions. But for a potential presidential nominee from a major political party to embark on a regimen of supplements as a form of prostate cancer treatment, that is astoundingly bad judgment.

The fact that he's a doctor, makes it more so.

And the fact that he's standing up in front of an audience, microphone in hand, being videotaped for posterity, makes it even more so than that.

In the event that Dr. Carson were to be elected president, one of the issues that might come before him is an effort promoted by public health authorities and academics to revise or revoke the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act, or DSHEA, which was enacted in 1994 at the behest of Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Tom Harkin (D-IA) and proves to be a major threat to public health to this day.

One wonders how he would view such a salutary move, given his involvement with supplements and their makers. Whatever his overall policies might be, this particular unscientific stance seems to me to be completely at variance with his excellent training, accomplishments and award-winning surgical skills.