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Q&A

'Heretic' doctor: M.D.s taught little but catch phrases

Robert S. Mendelsohn, M.D., says if you're feeling well, stay away from a doctor. He practices medicine in Chicago, teaches at the school of medicine at the University of Illinois, writes a syndicated medical column, and recently wrote a book, "Confessions of a Medical Heretic." He was interviewed by staff writer Connie Stewart.

Question: You say doctors do more harm than good, but that you started 25 years ago as a believer in and practitioner of "modern medicine." How did you get from there to here?

Mendelsohn: I turned from a conventional doctor into a medical heretic when, toward the end of the 1960s, I began to see the damage that my previous treatment had done to my patients. I believed my professors: I used to give X-ray treatments for tonsils. It took 10 or 15 years and the patients started showing up with cancer of the thyroid gland. I used to give tetracycline, an antibiotic, to children. It took another 10 years until their teeth started to turn yellow and green.

Q: One treatment that's now suspect is birth control pills. I know a woman who was on sequentials, a very high dose of estrogen, for six years, and her doctors never once told her that it might be dangerous or that she should take a lower dosage.

A: That's typical of the ethics of modern medicine — what I call the religion of modern medicine. Other religions teach you honesty. Modern medicine teaches you to conceal.

Doctors have slogans such as, "The pill is safer than pregnancy," which is ridiculous. The dangers of the pill are so great that I and the doctors I have trained don't use the pill, and we don't use the IUD. The association of both of them with cancer of the cervix and cancer of the breast is too strong to be overlooked.

Q: One of the things you talk about in your book is high blood pressure, hypertension. You say medicine used to combat it has

Q&A/A-5, Col. 1

Q&A

Continued from page A-1

some noxious side effects and high blood pressure can be treated by nutrition and exercise.

A: Well, the definition of high blood pressure has been changed. In 1971, the definition was anything higher than 165/95. In 1977 the definition was changed to anything higher than 140/90. Nothing scientific happened in those years to mandate that change. What happened was that a whole bunch of new anti-hypertensives were introduced into the market. My prediction is that by 1980 they'll lower it again, so it will be anything more than 120/80. Then 200 million Americans will be eligible for anti-hypertensive drugs.

Q: What can a patient do to protect himself?

A: My advice is that if you go to the doctor's office and he diagnoses you as having high blood pressure, go downstairs and take your blood pressure in the drugstore. It will usually be 20 or 30 points lower.

Then, if the doctor should write out a prescription for anti-hypertensive drugs, before you use it, look up the side effects in the public library.

Q: Let's talk about radical mastectomies. Is it really worthwhile for a woman with breast cancer to subject herself to such mutilation?

A: There is some evidence that women who have tumors of the breast who never reach a doctor do better than the ones who submit to modern therapy. The survival rate for cancer of the breast has not improved at all.

Doctors don't tell women what causes cancer of the breast, even though we all know. There are four factors: the pill, post-menopausal hormones, failure to have babies, and failure to breast-feed. The highest incidence of cancer of the breast in this country occurs in nuns.

The common denominator (of the four factors) is excessive exposure to estrogen. Whenever a woman becomes pregnant, the estrogen level goes way down. Whenever a woman nurses, the estrogen level goes way down.

Q: And, of course, the pill and post-menopausal hormones contain extra estrogen. Recently we interviewed the president of the American Medical Association. He told of a woman who had a lump in her breast, and had been fooling around with "quacks" for five years. Finally she came to him and he said, of course, after that length of time she was going to die. But five years is the length of time a cancer patient must live to be counted as surviving — and she lived that long without modern medical treatment.

A: You can use common sense, because you haven't been through medical education. We doctors aren't taught very much in medical school, but we learn certain catch phrases. One of them is, "You should have come to me sooner." That's always very helpful because then you can blame the victim. The second is, "You have to learn to live with it." And the third one is, "Well, you're 80 years old. What do you expect?"

Today there's another wonderful catch phrase, now that people are getting suspicious of X-rays. They say, "Doctor, do I really need this chest X-ray?" And the doctor says, "It's no different than if you spent a day in Denver." All of a sudden doctors know a lot about Denver.

Q: You say that even yearly dental X-rays are dangerous. Why?

A: Because all X-rays are cumulative. For years women have been told they shouldn't have babies past a certain age

Vol. CIX No.

Aug. 8, 1979

HERALD EXAMINER

because the danger of defects, including Mongolism, is too high. When I was a medical student I was taught that women over 45 shouldn't have babies. Now it is 32. And you're not supposed to have a teen-age pregnancy, so pretty soon if you don't have a baby between 24 and 24½, you will miss the boat.



Dr. Robert Mendelsohn
"Doctors a sick group"

It's been shown in a number of studies that the reason older women shouldn't have babies is because they have had so many X-rays over the years, which never disappear from their bodies. That's what causes changes in the genes and brings about Mongolism.

I usually tell people they should approach X-rays

Wednesday, August 8, 1979, Los Angeles Herald Examiner **A5**

like major surgery. If the doctor says you need an X-ray, tell him you want a second opinion.

Q: Another popular operation is the hysterectomy. Women with fibroid tumors often are given a hysterectomy, rather than a myomectomy, removal of the tumor. Why is that?

A: Well, the ethics of medicine say that God made a whole bunch of mistakes. One of the mistakes he made, according to pediatricians, was when he didn't put Similac into women's breasts. The obstetrician feels he made a mistake when he didn't put a zipper into women's bellies so they could have their babies Caesarean.

The surgeons feel God made a whole bunch of mistakes — tonsils, appendix. But one of the biggest mistakes he made was when he didn't cause the uterus to disappear after childbirth was over. Doctors feel that the uterus is a useless organ once you've had babies, and they jump to remove it.

Q: Doctors themselves aren't all that healthy, are they?

A: Doctors have a very high rate of narcotics addiction, alcoholism, broken marriages, psychotic breakdowns, depression, mental hospitalizations. I could go on and on. Doctors are a sick group.

Doctors' wives are a peculiar group too, because 50 percent of doctors' wives have had hysterectomies. One of my friends told me this proves that the hysterectomy is a good operation, because doctors are the most knowledgeable people in the country. My answer to that is, we need a new study to find out how doctors feel about their wives.



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