

Ritual Healing in Suburban America

COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE SERIES
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ACADEMIA AND CLINIC

The Placebo Effect in Alternative Medicine: Can the Performance of a Healing Ritual Have Clinical Significance?

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In alternative medicine, the main question regarding placebo has been whether a given therapy has more than a placebo effect. Just as mainstream medicine ignores the clinical significance of its own placebo effect, the placebo effect of unconventional medicine is disregarded except for polemics. This essay looks at the placebo effect of alternative medicine as a distinct entity. This is done by reviewing current knowledge about the placebo effect and how it may pertain to alternative medicine. The term *placebo effect* is taken to mean not only the narrow effect of a dummy intervention but also the broad array of nonspecific effects in the patient-physician relationship, including attention; compassionate care; and the modulation of expectations, anxiety, and self-awareness. Five components of the placebo effect—patient, practitioner, patient-practitioner interaction, nature of the illness, and treatment setting—are examined.

Therapeutic patterns that heighten placebo effects are especially prominent in unconventional healing, and it seems possible that the unique drama of this realm may have "enhanced" placebo effects in particular conditions. Ultimately, only prospective trials directly comparing the placebo effects of unconventional and mainstream medicine can provide reliable evidence to support such claims. Nonetheless, the possibility of enhanced placebo effects raises complex conundrums. Can an alternative ritual with only nonspecific psychosocial effects have more positive health outcomes than a proven, specific conventional treatment? What makes therapy legitimate, positive clinical outcomes or culturally acceptable methods of attainment? Who decides?

Ann Intern Med. 2002;136:817-825. www.ama-assn.org
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Efficacious therapy, in one biomedical definition, is therapy that has positive effects greater than those of an indistinguishable dummy treatment in a randomized, controlled trial (RCT) (1-3). Such specific efficacy is actually a comparative measure: intervention contrasted with placebo. This relative effectiveness, which is estimated by statistical testing, is taken to indicate "authenticity." The clinical significance, that is, the outcome measured by using the patient's original condition as a baseline, is usually a secondary consideration for determining "legitimate" medical interventions. Any clinical impact due to the placebo, which is deemed to lack "truthfulness," is even less notable and is valued only as a comparison baseline for "genuine" effects (3). Specific effects are by definition superior to nonspecific effects. The clinical repercussions of the placebo are tolerated as necessary nuisance noise but are otherwise considered inconsequential or treated with contempt (4).

Given the privileged status of specific effects, it is not surprising that the clinical impact of alternative medicine's placebo effects are routinely ignored (5). The only serious question has been whether alternative medicine has more than a placebo effect. Discarding all placebo effects in a single trash basket of "untruthfulness," however, diminishes our knowledge of important dimensions of health care. This essay examines the neglected clinical significance of the placebo effect in alter-

native medicine and raises the possibility that some types of unconventional medicine may produce placebo outcomes that are dramatic and, from the patient's perspective, especially compelling. The term *placebo effect* is taken to mean not only the narrow effect of an imitation intervention but also the broad amalgam of nonspecific effects present in any patient-practitioner relationship, including attention; communication of concern; intense monitoring; diagnostic procedures; labeling of complaint; and alterations produced in a patient's expectancy, anxiety, and relationship to the illness. This essay asks whether alternative medicine can have an "enhanced" placebo effect. In some conditions, can any of alternative medicine's particular rituals have a greater impact than the rituals of conventional medicine or than a proven physiologically active treatment? After all, as many of the examples in this essay will demonstrate, "two interventions may have different effects on patient outcome even though both [are] equivalent to placebo in clinical trials" (6). Dismissing a treatment as "just a placebo" may not be enough.

Alternative medicine may be an especially successful placebo-generating health care system. Rather than specific biological consequences, which epidemiologists designate as "fastidious efficacy" (7), alternative medicine may administer an especially large dose of what anthropologists call "performative efficacy" (8). Performative

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Ritual Healing in Suburban America [Professor Meredith McGuire, Debra on the practice of healing in suburban or what we might call middle-class America. MCGUIRE, Meredith B. (): Ritual Healing in Suburban America, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick This remarkably wide-ranging study of. Page 1. Page 2. Page 3. Page 4. Page 5. Reviews. Meredith B. McGuire, Ritual Healing in Suburban America, New Brunswick/. London: Rutgers University Press, Pp. xii + Si5 (pbk.). ISBN. Ritual Healing in Suburban America, by. MEREDITH B. MCGUIRE with the assistance of DEBRA KANTOR. New Brunswick, NJ]. Rutgers University Press, Ritual Healing in Suburban America, by Meredith B. McGuire with the assistance of Debra Kantor. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. Ritual Healing in Suburban America. Meredith B. McGuire, Debra Kantor. Animal Liberators: Research and Morality. Susan Sperling. One feature of these healing groups stood out, especially when data were compared across all the types of healing: the extensive use of ritual and symbolism. Ritual Healing in Suburban America has 7 ratings and 0 reviews. One of the more provocative studies of why middle America is making. Book Reviews: Ritual Healing in Suburban America. McGuire, M. (). New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. Show all authors. Carl O. Helvie. APA (6th ed.) McGuire, M. B., & Kantor, D. (). Ritual healing in suburban America. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. Available in the National Library of Australia collection. Author: McGuire, Meredith B; Format: Book; xii, p. ; 24 cm. Ritual Healing in Suburban America is a model of clarity, straightforwardly written and organized. Two introductory chapters are followed by four chapters on. Ritual healing in suburban America. Book. Send Message. See more of Ritual healing in suburban America on Facebook. Log In. or. Create New Account. Ritual Healing in Suburban America (Heftet) av forfatter Meredith B. McGuire. Pris kr Se flere boker fra Meredith B. McGuire. Healing in Suburban America is a successful attempt to examine and compare the healing illustrates the many functions of ritual practices and symbolism for.

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