

Mission for Truth: Critical Thinking ABC Nightline and MCS

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Part 3 Real Life Critical Thinking

ABC's recent episode of Nightline entitled Controversial Clinic for the 'Chemically Sensitive' provides a perfect opportunity for the practice of critical thinking. This month, we will critically evaluate the information presented in this story, which aired on March 20, 2008 and can be viewed online at

<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/story?id=4489265&page=1>.

This story implies that Dr. William Rea's clinic, The Environmental Health Center in Dallas, Texas, is controversial. As a note of history, an insurance company filed a complaint with the Texas Medical Board (TMB) to avoid paying Dr. Rea's fees for two satisfied patients without their knowledge. Dr. Rea is currently under review by the TMB and could potentially lose his license.

Nightline began the episode with "What if you "thought" that the world around you was making you sick? If you "feared" that the house you live in, the car that you drive and everyday activities such as watching television and talking on a cell phone were making you ill? Dr. William Rea "says" he has treated more than 30,000 people, from all over the world, who "believe" the world around them has made them

sick. Very sick."

The words "thought", "feared", "says", and "believe" set out to assert the opinion that the clinic is useless and the patients not sick before anything is covered. In doing so, members of the public are coerced and duped into a preconceived viewpoint without having all the facts. A story should be unbiased and examine the facts objectively and present a summary at the end.

The opening could have been objectified very easily if it had read "What if the world around you was making you sick? If the house you live in, the car that you drive and everyday activities such as watching television and talking on a cell phone were making you ill? Dr. William Rea has treated more than 30,000 such people, from all over the world." From their, both sides of the issue could be explored.

However, both sides were not explored. As a matter of fact, not a single piece of scientific evidence was presented to support the biological causation of MCS, and enough evidence does exist. To the contrary, Dr. Rea was questioned about why his studies were not published in peer-reviewed journals and he was shamed for not doing so and made to appear as those he never did any research. However, a internet search brings up numerous well cited papers by Dr. Rea.

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On deeper investigation one finds that these journals Rea was chastised for not publishing in are owned by pharmaceutical companies who have a vested interest in publishing studies which show the effectiveness of their drugs. Since chemical sensitivity is not treated by drugs, these journals refuse to publish these studies. The pharmaceutical industry and chemical industry are intertwined. The chemical industry also has vested interest in not publishing studies on chemical sensitivity treatments because to do so would be, in essence, to admit that their products are harming human health.

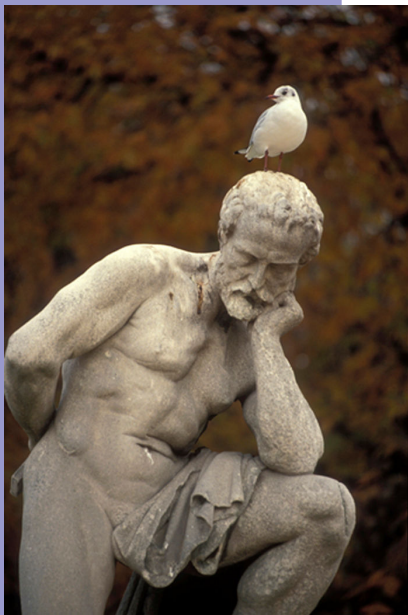
Scientific journals "selectively" publish studies and it has long been known in the research community that it is very difficult to have genuine studies published about chemical sensitivity. Dr. Rea does studies on chemical sensitivity. Therefore, the argument that Dr. Rea should be discredited because his studies have not been published is misleading. Appeals of irrelevance attempt to sway the listener with information that, though persuasive, is irrelevant to the matter at hand.

Dr. Kahn was consulted by the reporter for his opinion on Dr. Rea. Kahn made remarks about chemical sensitivity being caused by "stress". Kahn asserted that "most of these patients who have these ailments actually have an underlying psychiatric problem, and one of

the problems in this country is the under diagnosis and under treatment of psychiatric diseases, and I think we are all guilty of that." Under diagnosis of psychiatric problems? Research shows that 60% of Americans are taking antidepressants. Is that an under diagnosis? Is it really safe to assume that psychiatric problems affect more Americans than any other illness? I would seem that Kahn has exaggerated and presented a fallacy of irrelevance. The irrelevance being that all chronic illnesses have some co-occurrence of anxiety and depression. Chronic illness is, after all, life changing.

If we employ critical thinking, it turns out that Kahn lacks credibility. Recall the tests of credibility: reputation, ability to see, vested interest, expertise, and neutrality. Dr. Kahn is a board certified allergist and immunologist. Kahn made a psychological diagnosis of "stress" for 30,000 patients without a license to practice psychology or a referral to a licensed provider, disqualifying his reputation. In addition, Dr. Kahn made this diagnosis without examining any of the patients, therefore he has no first hand knowledge, or ability to see. Kahn lacks expertise as he is a board certified allergist and the majority of the biological evidence related to chemical sensitivity indicates an origin in slow acetylation and inflammation, rather than allergy. Kahn's primary research interests include "mood disorders in asthma", thus disqualifying his neutrality and providing an explanation for his inappropriate sight unseen diagnoses of "stress".

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Next we examine the attorney for the TMB, Mari Robinson. Robinson was quoted as saying, "We believe he (Rea) is posing a threat to the public health of the citizens of Texas." Robinson does not have a medical license, nor a medical degree. Rather, she holds a BA in Government from Angelo State University and a law degree from The University of Texas School of Law. Coming from a background in "civil litigation", Robinson is unqualified to make any decisions about medical practice. She lacks both expertise and ability to see. Being that she represents the TMB, an agency who decidedly has gone after all environmental medicine specialists, she has a vested interest in the demise of Dr. Rea and lacks neutrality.

What about the patient, Dr. Lisa Nagy? Nagy asserts that she had seen a psychologist for a year on a daily basis, thinking her chemical sensitivity was psychological. She is now back to normal thanks to Dr. Rea. Is she a credible source? Maybe, but Nagy is also an atypical patient. Upon doing some research, data supports that patients with MCS have do not have a higher rate of depression and/or anxiety when compared to people with other chronic illnesses, such as diabetes and cancer. The choice of Nagy as a patient may well have been made due to her psychiatric background in an attempt to discredit Rea and claim MCS is psychological.

One other patient was shown

for a brief time stating that she knew she was dying before she met Dr. Rea. Other than that brief glimpse without explanation for why she was dying, the patient was not shown again. This tactic appears to have been an attempt to make it appear as though the patient was exaggerating and chemical sensitivity is not really that bad. However, we were not given enough information to make such a judgment. How was chemical sensitivity affecting this woman?

Lastly, an investigation reveals that the majority of ABC's advertising income comes from pharmaceutical and chemical industries. It appears ABC lacks credibility too. Since chemical sensitivity is not profitable and the treatment is not a drug, the pharmaceutical companies have vested interest in claiming the condition is psychological to sell psychopharmacueticals. Likewise, the chemical industry has a vested interest in convincing the public their products are not harmful to health and the industry attempts to do just that by denying the existence of MCS.

Kahn beleives chemical sensitivity is classical conditioning. However psychiatric drugs, deconditioning, and cognitive behavioral therapy don't improve chemical sensitivity. Rea's detoxification and antigen treatments do. Patient's just want to get better. Isn't that what counts? Or, is "first do no harm" a Hippocratic oath?

Critical thinking sorted out the bunk in this poorly researched and biased ABC Nightline episode.