

SOPHISTICATED QUACKERY

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Throw in a few words and phrases like "in depth," "peer groups," "modalities," "emotional correlates" and "holistic health," and our index of suspicion stirs uncomfortably and triggers the alarm bell. Like the late George Orwell, we've come to believe that sincerity vanishes when garbage writing appears. When any supposedly legitimate medical organization indulges in such fanciful doubletalk, we instinctively run for cover, keeping a sharp eye out for the con artists soon to follow.

On the day that *JAMA* editorialized about the new, humanistic brand of medical practice ["Holistic Health or Holistic Hoax?" *JAMA* Mar. 16, Vol. 241, No. 11], a brochure from the American Holistic Medical Association appeared in the lounge, inviting all to participate in the second annual association meeting to be held in La Crosse, Wisconsin, May 18 – 24. Holistic Health, in case you need a definition, "emphasizes the value of looking at the whole person, including analysis of physical, nutritional, environmental, emotional, spiritual and life style values in addition to utilizing traditional medical modalities."

The AMA editorial, while admitting to some apprehension about polished speakers who "sound like they are more at home on a pulpit than on a podium," cautiously beats around the bush in evaluating the AHMA, describing its proponents as "a curious axis of faith healers, chiropractors, clergymen and PhDs, along with MDs, RNs, Docs and others without visible signs of qualifications." Although finding it remarkable that even legitimate physicians had been attracted into the fold, the editorial concluded meekly by advising physicians to learn more about it.

When a society becomes spoiled by its affluence, impatient with its accomplishments and bored by its conveniences, it looks for new amusements and channels its excesses of energy into eccentric and unusual pursuits. As decadence sets in, faddism flourishes. For almost two decades now, in music, art, literature, religion, dress, manners and morals, the far-out and freakish have multiplied. In a society that can produce a Jonestown affair, Playboy Enterprises, Saturday Night Live, and the disco scene, one should not be surprised to find that medicine has developed its own brands of lunacy.

The AHMA, founded only a year ago, apparently has already become a convenient roosting place for all varieties of fringe medical and quasi-medical loonies. The coming program in May will offer "Thirty-five In-depth Experiential WORKSHOPS" where you can learn about such things as spiritual and music attunement, psychosynthesis, waking

dream therapy, laying on of hands, electro attunement, spinal mobilization, biogenic, holistic nutrition and optimal dietary potentials, Feldenkrais method, Rolfing, meditation and Yoga, and to top it all off, a course in miracles. There will be six days of meetings, each day with its own theme of special interest to health professionals—the ultimate goal being to create something called "High Level Wellness." The brochure urges you to "join in, rejoice, regenerate and rejuvenate."

If this sort of sophisticated quackery appeals to you, for \$250 you can still become a charter member of the AHMA; and if you want to attend the full, six-day program in La Crosse with tuition, meals and room included, an additional \$240 for members or \$360 for nonmember physicians will cover it all. For all this rejuvenation and regeneration, the apprehensively cautions AMA will even give you 44 credit hours of CME. Have a Nice Day.

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