

Are We Missing Ways to Reduce Health Care Costs?

To the Editor:

In his “Commentary” article in the March 2010 edition of *The American Journal of Medicine* [1], Dr Dalen does an excellent job of outlining how we can reduce U.S. health care costs. However, the author makes some statements that call into question his true personal commitment to the reduction of health care costs. He states, “We offer minimal training in nutrition, prescribed exercise, stress reduction techniques, and other effective therapies for certain conditions, for example, acupuncture for specific chronic pain syndromes.” He seems to be implying that acupuncture is a proven therapy for chronic pain syndromes and is more than just a placebo, as is suggested by numerous recent studies. The books by Bausell – *Snake Oil Science* and by Singh and Ernst – *Trick or Treatment* shed more light on this discussion.

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Dalen’s other statement, “Medicare should not pay for procedures that do not benefit patients,” is a true statement, but not reflective of those who support payments for alternative medicine (unproven) therapies. Such payments, as will likely be allowed by the new health care bill, will prove very costly when paid for by the government. It should not have been a surprise that this expensive addition to the health care bill crept in under the radar when it was supported by the likes of Orrin Hatch and Tom Harkin (noted for their long-standing support of alternative medicine and profiting greatly from their support), and Harry Reid (chiropractic) and Dennis Kucinich (homeopathy). Can anyone, even the most ardent supporter of alternative medicine, support our tax money paying for homeopathic remedies?

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Reference

1. Dalen JE. We can reduce US health care costs. *Am J Med.* 2010; 123:193–194.