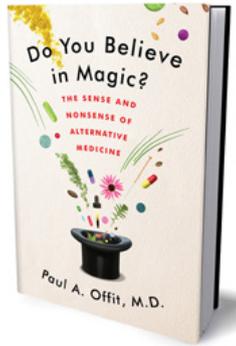


CHALLENGING THE CONVENTIONAL 'WISDOM' OF ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES



Alternative medicine, including dietary supplements and acupuncture, has become increasingly popular with many people. However [Paul Offit, MD](#), isn't one of them, and isn't afraid to say so.

Dr. Offit is a leader in the medical community's ongoing crusade against misinformation for his willingness to speak his mind, question popular (and at times ill-informed) wisdom, and defend science against its detractors. He is the chief of CHOP's Division of Infectious Diseases and directs CHOP's [Vaccine Education Center](#). Dr. Offit is also a co-creator of the rotavirus vaccine Rotateq.

In a move sure to earn him some new critics, Dr. Offit recently published a new book, *Do You Believe in Magic?: The Sense and Nonsense of Alternative Medicine*. The book has received a great deal of attention from the media, including *NBC News* and *CBS This Morning*.

In his latest book, Dr. Offit examines the science and science fiction behind alternative therapies such as megavitamins and alternative treatments including coffee enemas and laetrile, a chemically modified form of amygdalin, a naturally-occurring substance found mainly in the pits of apricots and peaches, used to prevent and treat cancer.

Dr. Offit acknowledges in the book that people often turn to alternative treatments after becoming disillusioned with conventional medicine. However, while "conventional therapies can be disappointing, alternative therapies shouldn't be given a free pass," he says.

In fact, alternative medicine "can be quite harmful," Dr. Offit points out in the book. "Chiropractic manipulations have torn arteries, causing permanent paralysis; acupuncture needles have caused serious viral infections or ended up in lungs, livers, or hearts; dietary supplements have caused bleeding, psychosis, liver dysfunction, heart arrhythmias, seizures, and brain swelling; and some megavitamins have been found to actually *increase* the risk of cancer," he writes.

Conventional and alternative therapies should "be held to the same high standard of proof," he notes in *Do You Believe in Magic?* For example, because megavitamins and other supplements are not regulated by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, "consumers don't know that taking megavitamins could increase their risk of cancer and heart disease and shorten their lives," Dr. Offit writes.

“The truth is, there’s no such thing as conventional or alternative or complementary or integrative or holistic medicine. There’s only medicine that works and medicine that doesn’t,” he says in the book.

No stranger to controversy, hate mail, and even death threats, Dr. Offit’s previous books include *Deadly Choices*, about the anti-vaccine movement, and *Autism’s False Prophets*, about the now-discredited connection between vaccines and autism.