

Alternative Health Education and Pseudocredentialing

The healthcare marketplace is fraught with "credentials," some legitimate, some overrated, some dubious, and some far afield of science.

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The next time someone who is not your spouse, lover, or trusted physician asks you to disrobe, spit, or urinate, think twice. And hold on to your wallet or purse. Quackery is going strong on the coattails of alternative medicine and has its own "credentials."

In the healthcare field, a *quack* is anyone who falsely claims medical skill. Some opponents of health fraud use the word to denote practitioners ranging from nonprofessionals bereft of medical skill who profess it, to physicians who make unfounded claims for methods they employ or preparations they administer. Nowadays, few quacks in the United States pretend to be M.D.s or osteopaths (D.O.s, who are equivalent to M.D.s). Providing fraudulent medical degrees is a high-risk business, and medical licensing procedures are stringent. However, practicing and would-be quacks can become "doctors," or at least diplomates, through a variety of correspondence courses.

Credentials and "Credentials"

The healthcare marketplace is fraught with "credentials," some legitimate, some overrated, some dubious, and some far afield of science. A bona fide credential is any evidence that one is trustworthy or has authority. However, since authority does not guarantee trustworthiness, whether a credential deserves confidence depends ultimately on whether the tenets that underlie the credential are worthy of confidence. "Authority-type" healthcare credentials range from the science-based (e.g., podiatric [chiropractor, or "foot doctor"] licensure) to the controversial (e.g., naturopathic licensure).

Credentials encompass (1) achievements and (2) documents that attest achievements. Many consumers mistake documentary (usually paper) credentials for proof of skill. Often, these are merely proof of past enrollment in an academic program, not proof of erudition or skill. Educational credentials are the professional standard because academic standing is more quantifiable than knowledge or skill. The most commanding educational credential, and therefore the most tempting to would-be misusers, is the doctorate. There are many types of doctorates, but all are categorizable as "traditional" (e.g., a nonhonorary Ph.D. degree), "professional" (e.g., an M.D. degree), and honorary (e.g., a D.Sc. [Doctor of Science] degree without academic status). Some types of doctorates in each category are considerably more doubtful than others. For example, *Bears' Guide to Earning College Degrees Nontraditionally* (1995) lists as controversial "professional degree titles": D.Hyp. (hypnotism), Graph.D. ("Graphoanalysis"), and H.M.D. or "M.D.(H.)" (homeopathy). Many such degrees are available throughout the United States.

In 1978, Kurt W. Donsbach (pronounced "donsbah"), D.C. (Doctor of Chiropractic), founded Donsbach University, which offered correspondence courses leading to bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in nutrition. Electrical engineer Gary Pace obtained a Ph.D. degree from this nonaccredited school before it was renamed, in the late 1980s, the International University for Nutrition Education (IUNE). Pace practiced as a "nutritional consultant" on Long Island, New York. In 1985, his ad in the Nassau County (New York) Yellow Pages stated that one could determine one's "true vitamins, minerals, enzymes and glandular needs" from such tests as "hair and diet analysis," "herbal saliva," and "computerized urine and vascular analyzer." That year, then New York State Attorney General Robert Abrams filed a civil suit against Pace, accusing him of practicing medicine without a license, false advertising, and illegal use of educational credentials. Abrams

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said that at least 251 clients had paid Pace an average of \$317 in the previous four years. According to the lawsuit, Pace had massaged women's feet, had sometimes performed lengthy and/or private mammary and vaginal exams, and had routinely requested a hair specimen (sometimes pubic). Finally, an injunction prohibited Pace from practicing medicine unlawfully and from publicizing his doctoral status.

IUNE operates as a nonaccredited "distance learning" institution in Chula Vista, California. It offers, for example, programs that lead to a Ph.D. degree in "Clinical Nutrimericine and Biological Sciences." Majors include "nutri-medical dentistry," "nutri-medical eye and visual health care," "nutri-medical homeopathy," and "therapeutic nutrimericine." Five of the thirteen members of IUNE's core faculty hold graduate degrees from Donsbach University and/or IUNE.

Also in 1985, a congressman opposed to quackery announced that he had become "Dr. Pepper": Claude Pepper had obtained a Ph.D. degree in psychology from Union University, Los Angeles, the nonaccredited correspondence school from which Donsbach has claimed a Ph.D. degree in nutrition. Pepper said that about half a million Americans had purchased unearned "credentials."

Does an ill-conceived system of academic accreditation lull consumers into accepting health-related rubbish and disinformation?

Who's Minding the (Academic Department) Store?

Accreditation is an especially thorny matter concerning alternative health education, which encompasses: (1) indoctrination in alternative healthcare (or occult medicine), in particular methods thereof, or in sectarian religious "healing"; (2) nontraditional academic programs that afford such indoctrination; and (3) nontraditional academic programs in science-oriented healthcare. Academic accreditation is recognition, by an agency or association, that an educational institution, university school, academic department, or academic program meets the reviewing body's administrative, organizational, and fiscal criteria. The many accrediting agencies, associations, bodies, commissions, and groups in the United States range from the reputable to the spurious. The U.S. Secretary of Education and the Commission on Recognition of Postsecondary Accreditation (CORPA), a nongovernmental organization, autonomously decide whether (1) to grant recognition to any functioning or would-be "accreditor" that expressly wants it, or (2) to withhold or withdraw it from such an entity. In practical terms, recognition constitutes publicizing acceptance of such an entity as an accreditor. (CORPA succeeded the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation on January 1, 1994.) Accreditation by accreditors "recognized" by either of the aforementioned organizations indicates only relative organizational soundness and intradisciplinary programmatic soundness. It is by no means a guarantee that the teachings of the accredited entity are consistent with science. "Recognized" accreditors comprise: (1) six regional accrediting bodies, which have the authority to accredit colleges and uni-

versities in respective regions of the United States; and (2) a motley group of more than fifty "national, professional, and specialized" accrediting bodies. The latter group includes accrediting entities for schools that specialize in and endorse Christianity, Judaism, chiropractic, naturopathy, and traditional Chinese medicine. Nevertheless, accreditation by a recognized accreditor at least weeds out fly-by-night and financially shaky organizations. Thus, absence of such accreditation is grounds for suspicion.

Pseudocredentials Galore

Published studies conducted since the mid-1980s, an annual (*New Age Journal's 1995-1996 Holistic Health Directory*, published in Fall 1995), and several books—notably the 336-page twelfth edition of *Bears' Guide to Earning College Degrees Non-traditionally* (Benicia, California: C and B Publishing, 1995) and the 200-page second edition of *The Common Boundary Graduate Education Guide: Holistic Programs and Resources Integrating Spirituality and Psychology* (Bethesda, Maryland: Common Boundary, 1994)—suggest that healthcare-related pseudocredentialing is rampant. Pseudocredentialing includes: (1) providing certificates, degrees, diplomas, and titles in a particular field to persons who have not demonstrated competence, erudition, or expertise in that field; and (2) providing a paper facade of medical know-how to persons whose course of study in the field of the "credential" had inadequate scientific content.

Pseudocredentialism is a byproduct of credentialism, which is overemphasis on documentary (particularly educational) credentials as prerequisites to employment or as augmenters of upward mobility. In the healthcare field, where competence often is a life-or-death concern, emphasis on certificates, degrees, and licenses, which facilitate ruling out unqualified job applicants, usually does not seem undue. In some cases, however, it does seem distorted. For example, between mid-1987 and 1993, I worked in two healthcare facilities where food-service managers who were not health professionals—they were not registered dietitians (R.D.s) and did not have a graduate degree—had authority over chief dietitians who were R.D.s with healthcare-related master's degrees.

While credentialism shortchanges some contributors to society and inappropriately aggrandizes others, pseudocredentialism tends to cheat all consumers. It encompasses: (1) the "for-profit" use of "credentials" obtained from pseudocredentialing organizations and (2) the misuse of bona fide creden-



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tials (e.g., registration with the Commission on Dietetic Registration—R.D. status) in an area where these credentials have little or no importance (e.g., medical diagnosis).

"Credentials" listed uncritically as "professional titles" in *The Common Boundary Graduate Education Guide* include: Acupuncture Physician (Ac. Phys.), Certified Acupuncturist (C.Ac.), Certified in Classical Homeopathy (C.C.H.), Diplomat in Homeotherapeutics (i.e., homeopathy) (D.Hr.), Doctor of Acupuncture (D.Ac.), Doctor of Oriental Medicine (D.O.M.), Homeopathic Medical Doctor (H.M.D.), Licensed Acupuncturist (L.Ac.), Master of Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (M.Ac.O.M.), Naturopathic Medical Doctor (N.D. or N.M.D), Oriental Medical Doctor (O.M.D.), and Registered Acupuncturist (R.Ac.). Because the predominant forms of most or all of the methods that underlie each of these "titles" lack scientific substantiation, I consider them pseudocredentials—signs of shaky philosophies that inspire little or no confidence in the scientific community.

Below I describe several relevant studies.

• In early 1986, the National Council Against Health Fraud (NCAHF) published the findings of its study of practitioner listings in the Yellow Pages under the headings "Dietitians" and "Nutritionists" within the preceding four years. The principal finding of this study, which covered 41 areas of 17 states, was that only 13 percent of 439 "nutritionists" appeared qualified. Furthermore, 46 percent of 24 physicians listed in a subsection titled "Nutrition" (under the heading "Physicians

Suspicious Characteristics

Most providers of dubious credentials make good first impressions, and many have a streamlined (and therefore inviting) application procedure and minimal entrance requirements. These are not signs of pseudocredentialing but may put consumers off guard. To evaluate a "credentialing" organization, consumers often must penetrate a veneer of friendliness and/or respectability. Below is a list of characteristics that are, in my opinion, grounds for caution.

- The organization does not possess accreditation by an entity recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education or CORPA.
- The organization claims accreditation, but neither the U.S. Secretary of Education nor CORPA recognizes the accrediting entity.
- Potential enrollees must pay to receive a course catalog.
- Consumer telephone requests for printed information elicit requests for prerequisite autobiographical letters.
- Literature from the organization does not specify the location of its headquarters.
- The organization has changed its address more than twice within ten years.
- Letters, postcards, or phone calls from the organization foretell a fee increase. During my 1994–1995 study, one program director, a naturopath who evidently thought I was a potential enrollee, spoke of such a deadline in three messages on my answering machine.
- The organization makes offers of substantial tuition discounts with short time limits. An introductory mailing from the University of Metaphysics postmarked July 12, 1995, included a "half-price tuition offer" expiration-dated July 31, 1995. In a follow-up mailing, postmarked July 20, 1995, the university added to this offer a free meditation course and a "Beautiful Doctoral Graduate Lapel Pin To Wear Proudly." (See below.)
- The organization mails unsolicited partial-scholarship applications to potential enrollees who have not requested a scholarship application. A mailing from the University of Metaphysics (see above) postmarked September 8, 1995, included an unsolicited scholarship application whose deadline was September 30, 1995. Persons who were unemployed, disabled, or retired, or who had a financial reason for not enrolling, qualified—with prepayment by September 30, 1995—for a tuition discount of approximately 90 percent. A "last minute scholarship reminder" followed.
- The organization offers a degree with a nonstandard wording. Examples are "Doctor of Holistic Health" (H.H.D.) and "Doctor of Naturology" (D.N.).
- The person who answers the phone for the organization does not immediately state the organization's name.
- Prerequisites for admission are trivial, very flexible, or nonexistent.

and Surgeons") were "clearly spurious," and none appeared qualified as nutritionists. Their offerings included acupuncture, chelation therapy, life extension, orthomolecular medicine, and orthomolecular psychology.

• In a comprehensive 1992–1993 Yellow Pages study sponsored by the NCAHF, Ira Milner, R.D., collected data from 64 areas of 32 states. The principal finding was that consumers had less than a fifty-fifty chance of finding a reliable "nutritionist" through the directory. Task-force volunteers consisted of registered dietitians, public health nutritionists, dietetic interns, and postsecondary nutrition students. They categorized 21 (9 percent) of the 231 businesses listed under the heading "Dietitians" as "spurious." These included Diet Center facilities, health food stores, multilevel-marketing distributors, a nutritionist with a dubious doctorate who practiced iridology (a pseudodiagnostic method involving examination of the iris), and a former vitamin company salesman who used hair analysis.

The "credential" initials used by dubious nutrition practitioners included: C.C.N. (Certified Clinical Nutritionist), C.N. (Certified Nutritionist), C.N.C. (Certified Nutrition Consultant), N.C. (Nutrition Counselor), N.M.D. (Doctor of "Nutrimedicine"), N.D. (Doctor of Naturopathy), O.M.D. (Doctor of Oriental Medicine), H.M.D. (Homeopathic Medical Doctor), C.C.T. (Certified Colon Therapist), R.C.T. (Registered Colon Therapist), C.M.T. (Certified Massage Therapist), and M.L.D. (Manual Lymph Drainage).

In September 1992, I telephoned all businesses listed under the headings "Dietitians" and "Nutritionists" in the 1992–1993 NYNEX Yellow Pages for the borough of Queens, in New York City. Only one of the 26 businesses listed seemed a reliable source of nutrition information; at least seven were health food stores or dietary-supplement distributors. A self-styled "certified eating-disorder specialist" told me he prescribed dietary supplements. When I complained of tiredness, he declared that tiredness is "the first sign of illness." A practitioner of "holistic nutrition" also said he prescribed such supplements and stated he had an N.D. degree "from Puerto Rico." (There were, and are, no accredited naturopathy degree programs in Puerto Rico. And any naturopathy degree is a sign of pseudoscience.) I asked where I could buy the supplements, and he said he had a "warehouse" in his office.

• In early 1994, the publishers of *Nutrition Forum* newsletter sponsored a follow-up to the 1992–1993 Yellow Pages study. In the follow-up, Milner decided that 17 of the 24 self-described Ph.D.s listed under the heading "Nutritionists" held "phony" Ph.D. degrees. Apparently, eight of the dubious doctorates came from nonaccredited correspondence schools (five from Donsbach University or the International University for Nutrition Education); one came from a nonaccredited college that required attendance; and one came from the "Clayton School of Homeopathy."

• In a spinoff of the 1992–1993 Yellow Pages study, I examined promotional mailings from diverse providers of alternative health education. Between mid-July 1994 and February 27, 1995, using *Nutrition Forum* letterheads, I mailed a one-page itemized request for perusable information and a one-page questionnaire to 50 "credentialing" organizations with addresses in 23 states. Selection of organizations was arbitrary. However, all had offered health-centered or customizable academic programs within the previous seven years. By February 26, my associates and I received course descriptions from 27 organizations, including questionnaire responses from eleven. Each of these organizations offered at least one academic program that: (1) covered human health and nutrition, or was adaptable to such a focus; (2) did not involve attendance, or required short attendance; and (3) culminated in a certificate (certification), a nondegree diploma, or a gradu-

ate degree.

The following findings pertain to the 27 organizations from which we received course descriptions during the aforementioned period.

At least 21 (78 percent) offered correspondence programs. Degrees available through nutrition-related correspondence programs included: Doctor of Divinity (D.D.), Doctor of Holistic Health (H.H.D.), Doctor of Naturopathy (N.D.), Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.), Doctor of Science (D.Sc.), and Doctor of Naturology (D.N.). ("D.N." also represents two other nutrition-related pseudocredentials: the degrees of "Doctor of Naprapathy" and "Doctor of Nutripathy.") A "Master Herbalist" (M.H.) diploma was likewise available through correspondence. Obtaining a "Health Educator" (H.E.) certificate required attendance at an institute for eight consecutive weeks. The H.E. certificate, the M.H. diploma, and all the aforementioned correspondence doctorates were not trustworthy.

Twenty of the organizations (74 percent) lacked (and still lack) accreditation by an entity recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education or CORPA.

Six of the organizations (22 percent) claimed accreditation by entities not recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education or CORPA.

Below I contrast two providers of alternative health education.

The Herbal Healer Academy

Founded in 1988, the Herbal Healer Academy (HHA) is non-accredited. It has a letterbox in Mountain View, Arizona. I learned of the academy from a mailing (Health Pak) I received in October 1995. HHA's Health Pak card quoted its founder and director, Marijah McCain, N.D., M.H. ("Master Herbalist"), "DIHom" (evidently a homeopathic "credential"): "Our Members Save Thousands in Doctor Bills! Some Members Save Their Lives!!!" HHA's "special" offer was "private" lifetime membership for \$5. The mailing I received the following month for \$5 included a laminated membership card, a copy of HHA's Fall 1995 newsletter (whose "front-page headline" was "... And God Gave the Herbs for the Healing of Mankind"); an interview with a nonpracticing chiropractor, titled "Essiac: Nature's Cure for Cancer"; a catalog of dietary supplements; a "Natural Medicine Supply Catalog"; and order forms. The latter catalog offered correspondence courses leading to certificates in acupuncture, Bach flower therapy, foot reflexology, "herbology," and hypnotherapy. The acupuncture course covered "electrical acupuncture," "electrical acupressure," "five element theory," "meridians," "Oriental diagnosis," and "Yin/Yang science." The "herbology" course covered reflexology. The hypnotherapy course covered neuro-linguistic programming (N.L.P., a quasi-spiritual "performance psychology" technique). The "Natural Medicine Supply Catalog" also stated that McCain had diplomas in aromatherapy, homeopathy, and Touch for Health (an offshoot of applied kinesiology), and that she had trained with "an outstanding Brazilian

psychic surgeon." There were no prerequisites for admission to any of the courses. At least two of them did not have a time limit for completion.

The main question here is not whether HHA's manner of "credentialing" by correspondence is technically sound, or whether its certificates represent proficiency. The nuts and bolts of an academic program are immaterial if its teachings are unfounded. The main question is: Do the certificates represent science-oriented learning, or indoctrination in unscientific methods? In other words, are they credentials or pseudocredentials? Are students learning facts about methods, absorbing propaganda, or simply learning little? To all appearances, HHA wants to attract would-be practitioners of the methods that are the courses' subjects. Certainly Bach flower therapy, foot reflexology, and traditional Chinese acupuncture lack scientific support ("Yin/Yang science" is an oxymoron). Thus I conclude that the academy is in the business of indoctrination, not education.

California College for Health Sciences

The main question regarding California College for Health Sciences (CCHS), in National City, California, is different: The question is whether the school's manner of credentialing by correspondence is sound. In other words, do its degrees represent proficiency?

CCHS is accredited by the Accrediting Commission of the Distance Education and Training Council, which is recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and CORPA. Last summer I applied to the school's Master of Science correspondence program in Community Health Administration and Wellness Promotion. (It also offers health-related correspondence programs leading to the degree of Associate or Bachelor of Science.) The application procedure was a breeze. There were only two entrance requirements: (1) a baccalaureate from an accredited school and (2) completion of an introductory psychology course. Graduation requires completion of 36 semester credits, 27 of which the enrollee must complete at CCHS. The school admitted me to the program within a month of my applying.

In October 1995, I enrolled in the first course in the core curriculum: "Ethical Considerations in Healthcare Delivery." Designed for the course and published by CCHS, the colloquial, 380-page textbook, *What Is a Life Worth?* (1993), is interesting despite grammatical imperfections, stylistic flaws, and typographical errors. But it's not especially user-friendly. Earning the self-contained course's three credits requires only that the student pass: (1) five "open-book" exams, which consist of multiple-choice and true-false items; and (2) a "closed-book" final exam, consisting of 100 items (most multiple-choice, some true-false), that must be supervised by a "responsible individual" who does not have a personal or professional "direct involvement" with the examinee. This is, in effect, an honor system. Students may take the final exam three times.

In November 1995, I phoned the college and inquired whether my primary candidate for proctorship was eligible. I

described her as a medical librarian who (1) worked at my former place of employment and (2) was a member of the editorial board of the newsletter I coedit. The woman at CCHS told me that the librarian could be my proctor.

The five "open-book" exams are half the basis of the final grade. To pass them, one need only search the textbook sections titled "Study Questions and Answers."

"Believing Is Magic"

Later in November, I enrolled in another course, titled "Health Psychology." Unlike the ethics course, this psychology course has a final project requirement, which involves interviewing five patients in a clinic or hospital regarding their pain. Supervision is not mandatory. The project is half the basis of the final grade. The course materials, which I received in December, included a 114-page booklet titled *Developing Self-Esteem: A Guide for Positive Success* (Menlo Park, California: Crisp Publications, 1994). My first assignment, in effect, was to "attempt" to do all the exercises in the booklet and mail the "completed" booklet to the school. The exercises,

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which are self-inventories, have no bearing on the final grade. On page 44, the author declares: "Believing is magic."

Because it has an easygoing exam system, requires only one internship (a three-credit course), and does not have a thesis requirement, the CCHS Master of Science degree may be more acceptable as an adjunctive credential than as a "stand-alone" master's degree. Nevertheless, I like the school's organized, uncomplicated, low-cost, continuing-education approach. For credentialed health professionals employed in a healthcare facility, the M.S. program may be worth a try.

"X-Filed"

Since early 1989, I have collected a wealth of promotional literature from assorted providers of healthcare "credentials." Below I describe thirteen of the many nonaccredited healthcare "credentialing" organizations that my 1994-1995 study did not cover.

• In early 1995, **Advanced Neuro Dynamics**, in Honolulu, Hawaii, offered in-state and out-of-state "Master Practitioner Certification Training." This afforded "Master Time Line Therapy Practitioner Certification" by the Time Line Therapy Association. Time Line Therapy (T.L.T.) is a group of "techniques," one of whose premises is that people store their "experience of time" on a line in space. Journeying on this so-called timeline to the past and future allegedly

charges one's "life-energy" and prepares one for the "incredibly powerful magic" of Huna, an esoteric tradition native to the Hawaiian Islands.

• In 1989, the **American Association for Parapsychology** (AAP), in Canoga Park, California, offered "A Complete Course in Parapsychology." This correspondence program led to a certificate of membership and a diploma. It featured such subjects as radiesthesia ("used in medical diagnosis"), psychometry (object reading, a form of divination), and "spiritual healing." In July 1995, AAP was offering a Doctor of Metaphysics "external degree" program through the American International University (AIU), a nonaccredited organization with which it shared a post office box. The program led to a Ph.D. degree.

• In 1993 and late 1994, the **American Society of Alternative Therapists** (ASAT), in Rockport, Massachusetts, offered the "Holistic Health Counseling (H.H.C) Certification Home Study Program," a twelve-videocassette course that led to: (1) a "certificate of certification in Holistic Health Counseling (C.H.C.)" from ASAT, (2) a "Diploma in Transformational Counseling" from the Institute of Transformational Studies, and (3) membership in ASAT for one year. Transformational counseling is a system of "facilitation" that encompasses "dream therapy," "parts therapy," "progression/regression therapy," and "psycho-neuro integration" (P.N.I.). A purported aim of P.N.I. (also called psychic healing) is the "recharging" and realignment of "subtle

energy centers." Apparently, the chief postulate of transformational counseling is that beliefs are the "real" cause of mental, physical, emotional, and "etheric" problems. ASAT was founded in 1990. In July 1995, it was still offering the "home study" version of its three-weekend course.

• For its 1991-1992 academic year, the **Atlantic Academy of Classical Homeopathy**, in New York City, offered a 500-hour classroom program that culminated in a "Certificate in Homeopathy (C.Hom.)." Previously, the academy had offered a "certification system" leading to a "Certificate in Homeopathic Therapeutics (C.H.T.)." Classical homeopathy involves extensive questioning of the patient by the practitioner, purportedly to determine the "single remedy" for that patient. The academy was founded in 1989. In August 1995, it had an "off campus" C.Hom. program.

• In 1993 and 1994, the **Barbara Brennan School of Healing**, in East Hampton, New York, offered the "4-year Professional Healing Science Training Program," which led to certification and "mastery in the practice of Healing Science." Barbara Brennan healing science is a "spiritual" system concocted by Barbara Ann Brennan, author of the best-seller *Hands of Light: A Guide to Healing Through the Human Energy Field* and *Light Emerging: The Journey of Personal Healing*, both published by Bantam. Her "science" is a form of so-called energy field work that involves "Core Star healing" and "Hara healing." (Some spiritualists use the Japanese

word *hara* to denote the *tanden*—the alleged seat of *ki* [supernatural “energy”] in humans, slightly below the navel.) According to the 1995–1996 *Holistic Health Directory*, “the healer works to clear the client’s [energy] field of unhealthy and blocked energies, charge depleted areas, repair distorted patterns, and balance the entire field.” The school was founded in 1982. In July 1995, it was still offering the program described above.

• In 1990 and 1991, the **California School of Herbal Studies** (CSHS), in Forestville, California, offered an eight-week program on the West Coast that led to a “Certificate in Therapeutic Herbalism.” The school also offered a correspondence course titled “Therapeutic Herbalism” (previously “Medical Herbalism”) to “anyone interested in herbal health care.” It described this course as similar to the former and as the cornerstone of “developing a practice as a medical herbalist.” The school was founded in 1978. In mid-1995, CSHS offered an on-site “intensive training program” comprising two semesters: “Foundations of Herbalism” and “Therapeutic Herbalism.” The program led to a “certificate of completion.”

• In early 1995, **The DoveStar Institute** (also called the DoveStar Alchemian Institute), in Hooksett, New Hampshire, offered a program that led to certification as a “Reiki-Alchemia Therapist.” Reiki-alchemia is a union of: (1) reiki, a variant of the laying on of hands that posits “Universal Life Force Energy,” and (2) alchemia, a form of channeling that allegedly involves activating “Universal Fifth Dimensional Energy.”

• In early 1995, **The Focusing Institute**, in Chicago, Illinois, offered a five-level curriculum that led to a “Certificate of Completion.” Focusing is a “natural” stepwise system of “personal growth” based on the work of psychology professor Eugene (Gene) T. Gendlin, author of *Focusing* (Bantam Books, 1981) and *Let the Body Interpret Your Dreams* (Chiron, 1986). It involves “dreamwork” and “inner child work.” The latter is a form of “psychotherapy” popularized by author and theologian John Bradshaw. The purported effects of Focusing include: direct contact with the (allegedly palpable) “wisdom” of one’s body (i.e., prenatal “bodily meaning”); the flowing of “life’s energy” in “new ways of being”; discovery of one’s “genuine self”; and an increase in personal “whole[ness].”

• For its 1992–1993 academic year, the **Institute of Transpersonal Psychology** (ITP), in Palo Alto (previously in Menlo Park), California, offered two “M.A.” correspondence programs: (1) the 21-month “Master of Arts in Transpersonal Studies (M.A.T.S.)” program and (2) the 27-month “Master of Transpersonal Psychology (M.T.P.)” program. Transpersonal psychology is a combination of Eastern mysticism, Jungian psychology, and psychosynthesis (a “spiritual psychotherapy”). Italian psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli, M.D. (1888–1974), originated psychosynthesis in 1910. Its purported design is to effect the “integration” and “growth” of the self and to release and direct “psychic energies” allegedly generated thereby. ITP was founded in 1975. By 1994, it attained a “preaccredited sta-

tus” recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education, and “Candidate for Accreditation” status with CORPA. The institute may achieve accreditation in 1998.

• In early 1995, **The New Seminary**, an interfaith “National Academy of Wisdom” in New York City, offered “The Physician of the Soul Program,” a videotape course whose subjects included such “spiritual approaches to healing” as: creative visualization, “Homeopathic Healing,” hypnotherapy, “Kabbalistic Healing,” “Quantum Healing,” rebirthing, reiki (a variant of the laying on of hands), shamanic healing, shiatsu, and “Therapeutic Touching.” The course required attendance at a “one-day Intensive Retreat” and led to certification as a modern “Physician of the Soul.” The seminary was founded in 1981.

• In early 1994, the **University of Metaphysics**, in Los Angeles, California, offered self-paced, “all home study” doctoral programs that led, for example, to a Ph.D. degree in “healing” and degrees in “holistic science” (Hsc.D.) and “metaphysical science” (Msc.D.). It advertised that its programs had but one prerequisite: “a sincere desire to improve the quality of human life.” On July 7, 1995, I mailed a check for \$5 to the organization’s “communications address,” in Studio City, California, for a “detailed Research Report” and “full details” of the “Doctoral Degree Program.” The mailing I received about a week later included a letter from dean Paul L. Masters, Msc.D., in which he said a “Student Enrollment Drive” was in progress, enabling enrollment before August at half the regular tuition.

According to the so-called research report, titled “A Doctoral Career in Metaphysics” (1994, by Paul Leon Masters), (1) the International Metaphysical Ministry is the university’s parent body; (2) the doctoral program is self-paced, and enrollees can meet degree requirements in less than a year; (3) upon successful completion of the first six months of study, enrollees receive the Ministerial Ordination Diploma, which “gives one the legal right” to “practice spiritual healing,” and the “Practitioners Ordination Diploma,” which “protects one’s right legally to practice Spiritual Healing”; and (4) to those who successfully complete the “Doctoral Degree Program” and have “Ministerial standing” with the International Metaphysical Ministry, the “university” gives one of three “Ph.D.” degrees: Doctor of Metaphysics, Doctor of Metaphysical Counseling, and Doctor of New Thought Ministry.

The Bottom Line

Few providers of alternative health education deserve the personal consideration of health professionals who desire *additional* credentials; i.e., few deserve candidacy as sources of credentials for credentialed people. Even fewer deserve the personal consideration of *would-be* health professionals.

Credentialing by correspondence may be a viable, even promising, movement. Alas, it is a movement dominated by fast-buck artists, charlatans, and propagators of mysticism, pseudoscience, and supernaturalism. □