

[TM Ayurveda Article Comes Under Fire](#)

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Top American Medical Magazine Questions Propriety of Story Authors

It was a pitta (body/mind ayurveda type that is ambitious) accomplishment for the Transcendental Meditation movement - getting an article on their program of the Hindu life science of ayurveda into the May '91 issue of the prestigious Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). TMer's from Maharishi International University in Iowa to the world headquarters in India celebrated with unified-field theory euphoria. Deservedly so. JAMA is read with critical reverence by tens of thousands of medical doctors in the US. It is widely quoted in other journals, and the news media often transplant stories from it. Titled Maharishi Ayur-Veda: Modern Insights into Ancient Medicine, the 3-page article was co-authored by Dr. Deepak Chopra, Dr. Hari M. Sharma and Brihaspati Dev Triguna. It incorporated a bit of Hindu (the word Hindu is never mentioned) medical history and a good digest of ayurveda physiology and psychology - all of it backed up with TM's own research data. Worldwide ayurvedic physicians could say ayurvedic products and the Transcendental Meditation program itself. The most touted product in the article was Maharishi Amrit Kalash.

But the celebratory bubbles at TM began to burst as JAMA was informed that the authors of the Maharishi Ayur-Veda article gave misleading disclosures - statements that tell what executive, associative or financial connections the author has with the institutions, services or products referenced in an article. A standard in professional magazines, disclosures ensure editors and readers of the writer's neutrality.

In the Sharma/Chopra/Triguna case JAMA received in October 1990 a letter from the three authors stating they were consultants for Maharishi Ayur-Veda Products International (MAPI), the sole distributor of TM's line of ayurvedic substances. A second letter from them in January 1991 stated that the three had no associations with the TM organizations and listed non-TM associations as their affiliations. After

publishing the article in May, JAMA was notified of the possible undisclosed financial interests.

The questionability of disclosure set off a chain reaction that engulfed chief Maharishi Ayur-Veda spokesman and promoter Dr. Deepak Chopra, the TM ayurveda program and TM itself. Chopra is a personable, articulate speaker and writer with four published books on the Maharishi Ayur-Veda including the bestseller *Perfect Health: the Complete Body/Mind Guide*. An endocrinologist in Western medicine, he embraced TM and ayurveda in 1985 and says he has treated 10,000 patients since. More than any other individual he has introduced ayurveda (Maharishi ayurveda) to western mainstream doctors.

The TM article appeared in the May edition of JAMA, an issue dedicated to exploring ancient and traditional medical models. So JAMA was not antagonistic to publishing an article on ayurveda or one associated with TM. In contrast, the Journal's parent - the American Medical Association (AMA) - is a powerful lobbying body in the US which has viciously attacked the chiropractic profession and other alternative health approaches. Two years ago it bit into animal rights groups, including secret plans to prod the IRS to revoke such groups' non-profit status. Ironically and sadly, TM's own ayurvedic products are tested on animals.

By June JAMA was under a blizzard of pro-and-con letters on the article and JAMA writer Andrew A. Skolnick was busy putting together a biting, carefully researched expose on TM's health program and marketing strategies. The JAMA editors also allowed him to criticize Hinduism in the process. Skolnick had already interviewed Chopra by June 17th who admitted being a consultant for MAPI. Chopra is also medical director of the Maharishi Ayur-Veda Health Center. Both MAPI and the health facility are located in Lancaster, Massachusetts. Chopra was also president, treasurer and clerk until 1988 for MAPI. On June 20th Skolnick received a faxed letter from Chopra claiming he no longer had any connection to MAPI.

In August JAMA ran the three authors' revised disclosure, including Chopra's statement that he was a board member of MAPI.

Things went nuclear in October with JAMA's publication of the article's letters-to-the-editor and Skolnick's plutonium-packed 6-page report entitled,

Maharishi Ayur-Veda: Guru' Marketing Scheme Promises the World Eternal 'Perfect Health.' Science editors at big city newspapers picked up on the story. David Periman of the San Francisco Chronicle began, "The Journal of the American Medical Association charged yesterday that followers of Indian guru Maharishi Mahesh Yogi duped the magazine into publishing an article touting a line of Hindu herbal medicines without revealing their own financial interests in the healing systems." Periman talked to Chopra in Belgium. Chopra said JAMA's charges were "hilariously comical," pointing to the magazine's advertising ties with the medical industry. He told the Chronicle "I don't see how this can be a conflict of interest."

Skolnick's story methodically relates TM's research, finance and marketing policies. The story took particular aim at the expensive price tags for Maharishi Ayur-Veda treatments. A year's supply of Maharishi Amrit Kalash cost US \$1,000, more than half of the average health care cost of an American citizen. TM's yagyas (fire ceremonies) performed for illness cost from \$3,300 to \$11,500. Yet, Skolnick failed to mention that western drug treatments are equally as expensive.

Drs. Chopra and Sharma are men of integrity and it is very doubtful there was purposeful deception involved here. Their original article presented ayurveda as viable and even visionary. But the disclosure carelessness has cast a shadow on not only TM but ayurveda as well.

The Reputation of Ayurveda

In June, 1987, TM was invited to make a presentation at an Economic Botany conference in Chicago. TM submitted two abstracts. But when they arrived, they brought a local CBS TV camera crew and gave instead a not-so-impromptu marketing presentation on the Maharishi product line. Charlotte Gyllenhaal, Ph.D, who helped organize the conference, said there "is so much potential for finding useful drugs from the thousands of years of interesting observations made by India's traditional healers. It's really a shame that this group's deceptive activities may become associated with all of ayurveda."

Cult Battle

The October "Letters to the Editor" section of JAMA was to battleground between pro TM doctors and anti-TM experts, many of whom are hired guns for cult activists. Excerpts follow:

"JAMA should be highly praised for its recent publication concerning Maharishi Ayur-Veda. Maharishi Ayur-Veda addresses preventive medicine at its most fundamental aspect, long before physical manifestation of the disease process is evident." David Perlmutter, MD. "The article you published on Maharishi Ayur-Veda sent up a number of inflated and magical balloons. Much of the scientific material I have read supporting TM is based on nonfalsifiable assumptions like Maharishi's idiotic extrapolations from unified field theories." Joseph P. Szimhart, paid consultant to "victims" of "the TM cult."

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