



October 1, 2016 – Grand Rapids, MI

Who Can You Trust?

With the Internet, health information is everywhere. That creates the health hooliganism that I talked about on Thursday. Everyone seems to be shouting that “This is good, that’s bad, and everyone who doesn’t agree with me (or us) has some form of hidden agenda.” It’s not just limited to the anti-something people. Scientists have joined together to start shouting their view about the sugar or food industry. How should you evaluate who’s saying what? Here’s what I do.

I check to see if the person has the background they claim to have. Do they have the PhD or Masters they say they do? I recently checked on a well known anti-aging expert who uses the title Doctor. It turns out that it was an honorary doctorate from a very small private college that doesn’t award doctorates in any field. Those types of titles may be nice to have, but they don’t mean you have any knowledge in the field you claim as being an expert. Tradition says you never use the title—unless you want to impress people, I guess.



Moreover, does this expert actually have the degree in the correct field? This happens with many writers. They criticize an industry or promote a diet with a journalism degree but no science background. They may be expert writers, but do they understand the science?

What about those who do have degrees in a scientific field? Let me use a well-known talk-show host who is a physician. He is board-certified in a specific field of medicine. That doesn’t mean he knows anything about nutrition, supplementation, statistics, or research design. His MD gives him a credential for a specific area; it’s not carte blanche permission to talk about everything related to health. It’s just an individual opinion that can get accepted as fact because of the credential, not his knowledge base.

Another well-known guest on talk shows goes one further. He uses Doctor of Natural Medicine as one of his titles. I checked it because I hadn’t seen that degree before. It’s not a degree; it’s a certification. It means he has a professional degree in medicine and has used natural treatments in his practices for so many hours. That isn’t what he trained for nor does it mean that he knows as much as he claims.

Why am I so picky about this? The simplest way of explaining it is this. I taught anatomy, physiology, and so on in college; I understand the anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, neurology, and cell structure of the heart in great detail. That doesn’t mean I can do open-heart surgery.

One final example. The discussion about GMOs I mentioned involved a video. Once I found it and started watching it, I knew who did it; I had seen it before. This was an anti-GMO film by a filmmaker with no training in science at all. It’s an impassioned look at GMOs and the purported big business and corruption behind them.

If you don’t know the science, how do you know who to believe when you interview them? You can’t check the facts because you don’t know what they are. You won’t even know the correct questions to ask. What you can do is support your point of view by choosing who you allow to be on your film as an expert. You can yell and yell but say nothing. It eliminates a reasonable conversation about the facts.

Let me add one more measure, and repeat the Watergate-era phrase: follow the money. If someone is telling you which supplements to buy and also sells supplements on his website, how unbiased do you think he is? If pro-sugar research results were funded by an organization of sugar marketers, do you think there’s any way negative research would have ever seen the light of day? There’s far too much salesmanship masquerading as science.

The Bottom Line

There is way too much health hooliganism going on today. I want you to be able to discern what's real and what's not. I know it's tough, but you have to be an informed consumer. Don't mistake television appearances and published books as evidence of expertise. Check out the person's background.

You may think that I'm going to tell you that you can trust me to be the beacon of expertise in this mess. No, I'm not. What I want is a reasonable discussion about the issues: vaccinations, GMOs, the pharmaceutical industry, sugar, fat, and every other health topic. Shouting isn't discussing and finger-pointing accomplishes nothing. We may not see eye to eye on every issue, and that's okay. We just need to bring civility back to the health field. That's what I'm going to try to continue to do because the world doesn't need another hooligan.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

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