

# OSCAR ZOROASTER PHADRIG ISAAC NORMAN HENKLE EMMANUEL AMBROISE DIGGS



I want to introduce you to a physician. After training at some of the country's top institutions, he has risen to the level of full professor and vice chair of his department at an Ivy League university. Triple board certified, he has authored hundreds of peer-reviewed articles and been awarded several patents. He clearly understands the scientific method and the

importance of basic science and clinical research. He has dedicated years of his life to the pursuit of scientific truth.

His name is Mehmet Oz, MD.

Dubbed "America's doctor" by Oprah Winfrey, Oz is well known as the star of his own television show, which provides information on healthy lifestyles. In 2008, *Time* magazine included him on its list of the "100 Most Influential People."<sup>1</sup>

To say that Oz is a controversial figure in medicine is an understatement. He is a tireless promoter of so-called alternative and complementary medicine. In March 2011, Oz excitedly stated on his show that homeopathy could ease people's aches and pains without the use of prescription medication. His guest, Russ Greenfield, MD, explained how homeopathy works, even in extremely dilute concentrations, when not a single molecule of the original drug remains: "The essence of the medication—oh, let's say the spirit of the medication—is imbibed and it sends a message to the body to heal itself."<sup>2</sup> Oz stated, during the same show, that his family uses homeopathic treatments.

In March 2012, on a show titled "Medium vs. Medicine," Oz had as a guest a psychic who claimed she could communicate with the dead. In fact, Oz has devoted several shows to psychics and those who claim to speak to spirits. Describing his own reading from television psychic John Edwards, Oz stated, "Let me tell you, it changed my life!" and "I've learned in my career that there are times when science just hasn't caught up with things, and I think this may be one of them."<sup>3</sup>

During another show, Oz interviewed Dr. Mosaraf Ali, the miracle healer to Sylvester Stallone, Prince Charles of England, and others, regarding his use of iridology. According to this widely debunked, bizarre belief, each part of the iris corresponds to a specific area of the body, and a person's state of health can be diagnosed by examining particular regions of the iris.<sup>4</sup> After expressing his amazement at Dr. Ali's diagnostic abilities, Oz stated, "I want to applaud Doctor Mosaraf Ali because these are ancient traditions and they have been around for centuries so who am I to dismiss them?"<sup>5</sup>

Who? Oz is a trained clinician and scientist, someone who can read a scientific article with a critical eye. He is someone who can filter out the noise of the placebo effect or discern the simple carnival tricks of a charlatan. The problem is that most people in his audience cannot.

Some observers of this spectacle have had enough. In 2013, *Forbes Magazine* published a list of Oz's "Five Wackiest Medical Beliefs."<sup>6</sup> In an influential 2013 article for *The New Yorker*, Michael Specter asked rhetorically, "Is the most trusted doctor in America doing more harm than good?"<sup>6</sup> In 2014, a Senate subcommittee grilled Oz regarding his unfounded claims about miraculous dietary supplements.<sup>7</sup> Missouri Senator Claire McCaskill, demonstrating some Show Me State bluntness, scolded Oz: "I don't know why you need to say this stuff, because you know it's not true. Why—when you have this amazing megaphone and this amazing ability to communicate—would you cheapen your show by saying things like that?"<sup>7</sup> On April 15, 2015, 10 prominent physicians sent a letter to Columbia University calling Oz's faculty position there unacceptable and citing his "egregious lack of integrity."<sup>8</sup>

Although the scientific community has turned against Oz, the unfortunate reality is that he is perceived as a scientific authority by millions of people who receive their relationship advice from Dr. Phil and, presumably, their time-travelling advice from Dr. Who. Simply put, Oz is an entertainer. Many believe he is doing great harm by preventing or delaying proper diagnosis, providing false hope, and encouraging people to waste money on useless treatments. As far as I am concerned, the wackier he gets, the easier it is to logically debunk his claims. ■

Steven J. Dell, MD  
Chief Medical Editor

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