

Viewpoint: Here's how the New York Times botched an op-ed about placebos

As part of the continuing decline of the New York Times, we have this new op-ed by Steve Petrow, a writer from North Carolina who, the paper says, “is a regular contributor to Well” (the paper’s health column). But this is more about woo than about health.

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Petrow’s point is apparently twofold: curative “placebo” effects can result from the use of talismans, amulets, or comforting objects like plush rabbit toys. Further, he says, these objects can soothe one and even make one optimistic. I’m prepared to accept the second claim but not fully the first.

Petrow was apparently cured of testicular cancer when, 34 years ago, he was diagnosed and also given a “velvety rabbit with big floppy ears” named “Fairy God Bunny”. He brought the rabbit to all his appointments and, sure enough, has been cancer-free for decades. Of course, testicular cancer is one of the most curable forms of the disease, and I doubt that a fluffy bunny could have helped him with mesothelioma or pancreatic cancer.

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The downside of the Times article is that it doesn’t point out the many failed experiments in which even placebo effects were not useful, and it implies that there is “magic”, which is not really what is going on here. If there is any psychological or even curative effect of amulets and lucky objects, it is purely natural.

Read full, original post: [NYT op-ed endorses amulets and other woo for disease](#)