



PENINSULA
— MEDICAL SCHOOL —
UNIVERSITIES OF EXETER & PLYMOUTH

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I qualified in 1978 as a physician in Munich (Germany) where I also completed my MD and PhD theses. In 1988, I became Professor in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PMR) at Hannover Medical School (Germany) and in 1990 Head of the PMR Department at the University of Vienna (Austria). My remit in Vienna was to build up a large rehabilitation unit to serve the then newly constructed “Allgemeines Krankenhaus” with more than 2000 beds. During my 4 years in Vienna, I extended the pre-existing unit of ~20 staff to a department with ~100 employees. My department was the first clinical unit to move into the new hospital. All of this was an organisational challenge and a most rewarding exercise.

In 1993, I came to the University of Exeter to establish the worldwide first Chair in Complementary Medicine. In this position, I decided to test the claims of complementary medicine using the tools of science. If anything, this was an even greater challenge. Within a few months I recruited a multidisciplinary, multinational team to tackle it. My accomplishments include:

- several dozens of clinical trials,
- over 100 systematic reviews,
- several books, most recently ‘The Desktop Guide to Complementary and Alternative Medicine. (Elsevier 2006), ‘Oxford Handbook of Complementary Medicine’ (2008), and ‘Trick or Treatment? Alternative Medicine on Trial’ (2008). This last book is an attempt to summarize the evidence for or against complementary medicine such that it is accessible for the lay person. The Sunday Times (20 April 2008) praised our book as being “fearless, intelligent and remorselessly rational”.

A few examples of my primary research may provide an insight into my research.

- When I started my post in Exeter, the general consensus in the world of complementary medicine was that these treatments are free of adverse effects. Using simple survey methodology we were able to show that this is not so. For instance, ~13% of patients using acupuncture reported adverse effects of his intervention (Nature 1999; 381: 361), a figure that turned out to be very similar to the one later generated through a large prospective cohort study (BMJ 2001, 323: 485-6). In the case of chiropractic spinal manipulation we demonstrated that very serious effects (vertebral arterial dissection) exist and that underreporting of such events is 100% (J Roy Soc Med 2001; 94: 107-10)

- Spiritual healing may seem as a most implausible form of treatment, yet it is important simply because in the UK ~14000 healers are registered. Our study (Pain 2001; 9: 79-89) was designed to test whether healing has effects beyond placebo. For this, we had to introduce innovative concepts in study design. The results demonstrated impressive placebo effects but no specific effects. Our methodology has been adopted by many other investigators who also confirmed our findings.
- The ‘flagship’ remedy of homeopaths is Arnica which is used for bruising and other trauma. Our RCT tested this hypothesis using two different “potencies” of Arnica compared against placebo. Our conclusion was that “homeopathic Arnica has no advantage over placebo in reducing postoperative pain, bruising and swelling in patients undergoing elective hand surgery” (J Roy Soc Med; 96: 60-65). Several independent systematic reviews have since come to similar conclusions.

Perhaps my greatest achievements in complementary medicine research include the following:

- to demonstrate that complementary medicine can be scientifically investigated which, in turn, brought about a change in attitude both in the way the medical establishment looks upon complementary medicine and in the way complementary medicine looks upon scientific investigation.
- to demonstrate that not all of complementary medicine is free of risks.
- to inform the public reliably about the evidence on the efficacy and safety of complementary medicine.

My work has been internationally recognised through 13 scientific awards and 2 visiting professorships; one from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (1999) and one from the UCLA in America. The full list of my awards is as follows:

- Scientific prize Zeitschrift für Allgemeinmedizin 1984, Germany.
- Kneipp-Preis 1984, Germany.
- Van-Aaken-Preis 1985, Germany.
- Scientific prize Zeitschrift für Allgemeinmedizin 1986, Germany.
- Scientific prize Zeitschrift für Allgemeinmedizin 1987, Germany.
- 1st prize Conrad Jobst Award (Am. Congr. Rehab. Med.) 1989, USA.
- Scientific prize Zeitschrift für Allgemeinmedizin 1989, Germany.
- Preis der Stadt Bad Kissingen 1988 (awarded 1990), Germany.
- Scientific prize Zeitschrift für Allgemeinmedizin 1991, Germany.
- Arpad Matrai Award, Hungarian Soc Clin Hemorrhology 2004, Hungary.
- Annual Health Watch Award, 2005, UK.
- Ernst Fletcher Memorial Award from the Rheumatology and Rehabilitation Council at The Royal Society of Medicine, 2006, UK.
- American Botanical Council: Norman Farnsworth Award 2006 (awarded March 2007), USA

During the last 15 years, I have given about 500 invited lectures. A few recent examples will probably suffice:

2008

- 27th Feb *Research in CAM*. Annual Research Ethics Training Conference, NHS, London
- 12th March *Are complementary therapies effective for OA?* NICE, London
- 19th May *Alternative Medicine*. Hay Festival, UK
- 12th June *Evidence-based approach to the use of complementary medicine*. EULAR, Paris
- 25th June *Evidence-based complementary medicine, a contradiction in terms?* Zon Mw, Den Haag (the Dutch equivalent of the MRC)

2007

- 1 Oct *CAM for Cancer: The good, the bad and the ugly*. NCRI cancer conference, Birmingham, UK
- 4 Sep *Nutzen: Begriffe und Implikationen in der Wissenschaft* Institut für Qualität und Wirtschaftlichkeit im Gesundheitswesen, Berlin, Germany (the German equivalent of NICE)

2006

- 9th-10th Feb *Herb-drug interactions: an introduction*, Health Canada, Canada
- 23rd Feb *Problems with the clinical research in the CAM field*, European School of Oncology, Brussels, Belgium
- 23rd May *Clinical studies and meta-analyses of homeopathy*, 44th Annual International Conference of Pharmacy, Meran, Italy.
- 31 Aug *Clinical trials and systematic reviews of herbal medicine*, 24th Ann Conf Soc Med Plant Res, Uni Helsinki, Finland
- 16th Nov Distinguished guest lecture, Imperial College, London.

2005

- 12th Jan *Systematic reviews of herbal medicines*, NIH conference on 'Herb-drug interactions', Bethesda, US
- 2nd Feb *Herbal medicines - interactions with synthetic medicines*, Food Standards Agency COT/CSM meeting, London
- 1st Mar *Alternative Medicine: any evidence*, Royal Society of Medicine Easter Lecture for young children, London
- 28th Nov *The Evidence for CAM: An Alternative but Complementary View from England*, Public lecture, UCLA
- 29th Nov *CAM for Rheumatological Conditions*, Rheumatology Society of California

I am Editor or Member of the Editorial Board of about 30 medical journals including:

- *Angiology* (Associate Editor)
- *BMC Complementary Alternative Medicine* (Ed Board)
- *BMC Medicine* (Ed Board)
- *Climacteric* (Ed Board)

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- Current Drug Safety (Ed Board)
- Focus on Alternative and Complementary Therapies (Editor in Chief)
- Journal Pain Symptom Management (Ed Board)
- Journal Society Integrated Oncology (Ed Board)
- Münchner Medizinische Wochenschrift (Co-Editor)
- Perfusion (Editor in Chief)
- Phytomedicine (Ed Board)
- PLoS Medicine (Ed Board)
- Supportive Care in Cancer (Ed Board)
- Wiener Medizinische Wochenschrift (Ed Board)

I am a member or fellow of numerous professional organisations including the following:

- Alternative Medicine Research Foundation, Canada
- Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance, UK
- Austrian Society of Internal Medicine
- Austrian Society of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation
- Cochrane Collaboration, CAM Field (UK Representative)
- Complementary and Alternative Medicine Research Policy Committee, DoH, UK
- Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh
- Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, London
- Hecht Memorial Foundation, Canada, Advisory Panel
- International Society for Complementary Medicine Research (Advisor)
- MRC Advisory Board, UK
- The 'Science Advisory Board', USA
- The Medicines Commission, UK 1994-2005
- WHO Uppsala Monitoring Centre, Sweden

My ultimate objective is to apply the principles of evidence-based medicine to the field of complementary medicine such that those treatments which demonstrably do generate more good than harm become part of conventional medicine and those which fail to meet this criterion become obsolete.

Edzard Ernst

<http://www.pms.ac.uk/compmed>
<http://www.pms.ac.uk/compmed/symposium>
<http://www.pharmpress.com/fact>

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