

Quacks Duck When They See Cousin Bob

by Steven Slosberg, *The Day* (New London, CT), March 3, 2005

Last fall, Dr. Henry Heimlich, known worldwide for the eponymous anti-choking maneuver, was to be a guest speaker at a conference on AIDS in Nashville. At the last minute, however, Heimlich, as the Nashville Tennessean reported, was uninvited.

Cousin Bob, the quack hunter, struck again.

To those who remember Bob Baratz growing up on Plant Street in New London, he is Dr. Robert S. Baratz, D.D.S., Ph.D., M.D., and in recent years, besides running a medical clinic outside Boston and being on the faculty of Boston University Medical School, he heads a medical watchdog group called the National Council Against Health Fraud. He is also, for the record, my first cousin, the middle son of Frances and the late Wilbur Baratz of New London.

Baratz works closely with Dr. Stephen Barrett, a retired psychiatrist from Pennsylvania, in rooting out and exposing what they and others, including a group called Quackwatch, deem medical charlatans and false remedies. He's on Heimlich's case for a couple of reasons.

Foremost is Heimlich's advocacy of treating patients with Lyme disease, HIV and cancer with malaria, which Baratz likens to Nazi war experiments. Baratz also claims that Heimlich did not invent the Heimlich Maneuver, but in fact affixed his name to the anti-choking manipulation and thrust developed by someone else, he being Edward Patrick, a professor of engineering at Purdue University. Initially, it was called the Patrick/Heimlich maneuver, says Baratz.

How the name Patrick was dropped ventures into another realm of allegation and intrigue, but for the purposes of space, if not avoiding libel, let's leave it that this quack-hunting business has gotten bloody on both sides. Baratz' credentials are being assailed online, too.

As Baratz said, this is serious stuff. He was quoted in the Nashville paper about malaria therapy the day before Heimlich's invitation was withdrawn. A news feature about Baratz and his mission was published last week by the Lawrence (Mass.) Eagle-Tribune.

Heimlich is in his mid-80s, lives in Cincinnati and was recently honored by the Cincinnati Business Courier with its Lifetime Health Hero Award. Heimlich's wife answered the phone the other day at their home, but, after consulting with her husband, referred all inquiries to a public-relations man in Cincinnati named Bob Kraft.

Kraft said much of the assault on Heimlich's name and achievement emanates from one of Heimlich's children, a son named Peter Heimlich, who is estranged from the family and, said Kraft, has worked nearly full time to harm his father's reputation.

Baratz has been in touch with Peter Heimlich, who has put up at least one Web site designed to debunk his father. However, Baratz said his crusade against the malaria therapy as treatment for HIV and other illness is just common sense.

The precedent for this practice goes back to the early 20th century when malaria was thought to be an effective treatment for syphilis. Inducing fevers through malaria, the theory went, helped the body's immune system fend off bacteria and virus. Heimlich was a nut when he came out for this for treating cancer, said Baratz. He got shot down for that. Then he shifted over to Lyme disease. He got shot down for that, then he shifted to HIV.

The New York Times, in a story published on March 4, 2003, reported that Heimlich hosted fund-raisers to pursue a malarial AIDS cure. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the Times, was among the opponents of malarial therapy.

Kraft said that Heimlich has ceased doing research into malarial therapy. Nevertheless, Baratz is hard on the prowl. Quack hunting gets ugly, but, as Baratz cautioned, the consequences of snake oil remedies can be rather more severe.

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