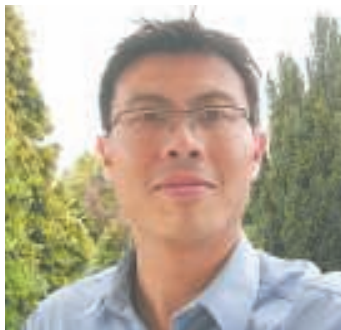


## More on the Placebo Effect

There are few things more distressing to a drug company shareholder than discovering that its “next blockbuster drug” is in fact no better at helping patients than an inactive sugar pill (placebo). This happens quite a lot, and can even happen to so-called “proven” treatments already approved for sale.

For instance, a 2002 review of 47 anti-depressant drug trials found that in 27 of the trials (almost 60% of them) the placebos helped patients just as much as the “real” drugs. (And they probably cost less.) Yet despite the obvious power of the “placebo effect”, it was sometimes thought that people who got better due to it were just imagining things (i.e. the changes were all in their head) as opposed to getting “real” benefits.

At best, if a placebo effect caused a change in something like blood pressure, it was still “just” a psychological effect on the body, nothing else.



**Dr Tat Loo: Chiropractor**

It’s been alleged that the main benefit of complementary and alternative healthcare modalities like chiropractic comes from the placebo effect.

Tongue in cheek, I would say that if creating a superior placebo response means that more people will be helped with fewer side effects and at less cost to the health system, then I’m all for it.

Anyhow, times are a-changing. We

all know intuitively that the body is smart and has considerable self-healing powers (this is a central philosophy of chiropractic care). It seems that the placebo effect may show off an aspect of these powers. Research demonstrates that the placebo effect is strongly related to the expectations a person has about their health and their treatment.

The more positive an expectation a person has on these issues, the more strongly they can experience a positive placebo effect. This is why giving hope in healthcare is crucial. And not all placebos are created equal.

A person who benefits from a placebo on a painkiller research trial has a different brain response to a person taking a placebo on an anti-depressant research trial. You can see this on brain MRI’s – the difference is real. Scientists are even discussing the possibility of developing (modulating) improved placebo effects for healthcare use.

This content reflects personal opinions of Dr Tat Loo, a Dunedin-based chiropractor.

He may be contacted on 474-0030 or at [info@bodymindspine.co.nz](mailto:info@bodymindspine.co.nz). Download a .pdf copy of this ad to keep or forward to friends by visiting our website and clicking “Health News”.

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