

Listen to my story

Cheryl Freeman exposes more dangerous devices masquerading as medical diagnostic and treatment instruments



Cheryl Freeman is a former nursing sister who has devoted her recent life to exposing the fallacies of harmful devices and treatments. She was named as Australian Skeptic of the Year for 1999.

It is hardly surprising that faced with chronic incurable illness or a life threatening disorder, patients and those who love them and care for them easily suspend critical judgment when offered new hope. There is no shortage of charlatans who will, for a fee and often a substantial one at that, offer false hope, frequently robbing the dying of dollars and dignity. No form of this quackery is more distressing than that which uses the comforting aura of pseudo science attached to an "instrument".

In the article that follows, Cheryl Freeman, nurse, medical detective, consumer advocate and tireless warrior for change, presents a sorry saga of consumer "rip-off" by individuals using worthless diagnostic and therapeutic machines, instruments or devices. Her challenge is one we should all champion. How, in a country that believes in consumer protection, can such non-science (nonsense) flourish? When will the community and our legislators move to protect the vulnerable? The answer, after reading Cheryl Freeman's article, should be "immediately".

Professor John M Dwyer
Head of the Faculty of Medicine
University of New South Wales

Question

Why on earth would any society allow the uncontrolled proliferation of unscientific or fake health screening and diagnostic machines and tests, when the attainment of the most accurate diagnosis is the fundamental right of all health consumers, and when errors or delays in obtaining a diagnosis can have very tragic outcomes?

Background

In 1996 I became filled with horror at the thought that an unborn baby in Australia could become infected with HIV as a result of fake electronic HIV tests conducted on its parents. Of equal concern was that others could progress to AIDS, and cancer sufferers could become victims of fake cancer tests. In the USA during the 1990s an HIV positive man died of AIDS after infecting his wife and unborn baby daughter. Others, unaware they were suffering from cancers, were later medically diagnosed with advanced cases. All were victims of impressively promoted, but worthless, electronic skin sensing (*Interro*) HIV and cancer test machines.

Unfortunately, these USA cases have not been reported in the Australian media despite the widespread use here of unscientific electronic

health-screening/diagnostic machines by the “qualified” alternative health and integrative medicine industry, an industry that forever promotes itself as highly ethical and safe.

What is frightening for me is that what has happened in the USA could easily have happened in Australia during the 1990s. And even more frightening is that it could still happen, despite some belated action by regulatory authorities and the federal court, if state and federal governments do not take very decisive and firm measures to regulate both this industry and the importation of foreign unscientific diagnostic machines. In July 2001 these thoughts still horrify me and compel me to tell this story based on my belief that the public has the right to know the truth.

A plea for action

All Australian governments, particularly those proposing to legislate for accreditation of alternative health practitioners and practices without conducting a thorough public inquiry into the industry, should take note of this report. If they fail to, they will do so at their peril and public health will suffer.

My story

My story began in 1985 when I finally gave in after a year of a friend’s pestering and visited a naturopath who tested me with his self-invented saliva testing “diagnostic computer”. He called this “bio-energy medicine” and announced that I was suffering from “diabetes, tuberculosis, virus, bacteria and fungal infections and malfunctions of bodily organs, plus a host of other conditions”. Other alternative practitioners confirmed his cancer diagnoses and ‘cures’. From 1986 I became aware of a qualified naturopath using this therapist’s machine who was also diagnosing infections including malaria, toxoplasmosis, cancer, faulty heart valves and blood clots.

By 1993 I had become increasingly concerned about the mass advertising of the USA made *Listen* machine, (also called electro-dermal screening

or EDS) as the “latest advanced scientific and computerised health screening-diagnostic technology”. This boasted of the machine’s capability to screen for tens of thousands of items including viruses, bacteria, organ and immune system functions, adding the “exciting news that the *Listen* was now approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA)”.

Aware that public claims of screening for “viruses, bacteria, organ and immune system functions” could mean that privately and covertly clients were being tested for potentially dangerous infections and cancer, I reported my concerns to the Federal Health Minister (responsible for the TGA) – who eventually informed me that the Therapeutic Goods Act devices regulations were not negotiable and that I should consult consumer groups about my public education concerns.

Promotion continues unabated

The *Listen* promotion continued with one magazine article in 1995 making HIV research claims for it. Claims for similar machines also continued, unchecked. A NSW chiropractor and a qualified naturopath both advised me that the *Vega* machine could detect “pathologic and malignant changes” and that the *Mora* machine could undertake similar tests while also treating the diagnosed conditions. High profile magazines boosted the *Listen* machine, one editor telling a national TV chat show audience in 1997 that “naturopaths now have machines that can test for viruses and bacteria”. Alternative therapy college educators, holistic medicos and book authors enthused about these machines with one predicting an “explosion in the use of these types of electro-diagnostic machines in Australia by the end of the 1990s”.

In mid 1996 the tide took an incredible turn when two clients of a *Listen* clinic, run by a public hospital-employed registered nurse, reported their experiences to me. They had been tested for HIV and cancer and told their tests were negative. Their computer print-out result

sheets confirmed their diagnoses of “hepatitis viruses B, C, D, and E” with the words “clear viruses from body” written on the sheets. Each was given a bottle of “extra special water remedy” made by the *Listen* machine and advised to have repeat monthly tests for four months. A potentially deadly delaying practice.

Fearing the worst, I made undercover phone calls to a national *Listen* distributor and several clinics, including two run by registered nurses, who confirmed that from 50 to 100 of the machines (then \$34,000 each) had been sold in Australia and New Zealand. Collectively they told me the *Listen* was superior to all current medical tests for detecting cancers, all viruses (including HIV and hepatitis viruses) bacteria, fungi, parasites, “orthodox vaccine damage”, and could “imprint healing frequencies” onto water molecules. I was given the names of other qualified therapists, holistic MDs (I was told that a Kings Cross AIDS doctor used the *Listen*), RN’s and dentists and brochures that stated it was “*especially safe and risk free to use on children*”.

Once again the alarm bells rang and I reported my concerns and evidence to relevant state and federal authorities, naively believing that given the seriousness of the issues, within weeks an official urgent public health warning would be issued. It was not. The NSW Health Care Complaints Commission and TGA in Canberra both began immediate investigations but these were compromised as they were conducted in secrecy with no public appeals for information. Understandably, the outcomes were limited.

Media action

My next move was the media: the *Sunday* (Nine network) report screened in May 1997 titled, “Orthodox Doctors-Unorthodox Practices” caught a Sydney GP advising an HIV-Hepatitis B positive man on antiviral drugs that his *Listen* test revealed he was “HIV and Hep B negative”. Prof John Dwyer, one of the country’s leading immunologists, and other AIDS experts were horrified. The

Listen to my Story

Listen distributor spoke vaguely about frequencies for viruses and bacteria. Another qualified naturopath confirmed that her *Vega* machine could “detect indications of HIV and hepatitis viruses”. Other high profile media holistic medics, who claimed they were not offended by being seen as “the lunatic fringe of medicine”, defended their use of *Listen* and *Vega* machines and *Live Blood Cell Analysis* tests as being “at the leading edge of modern medicine”. Public outrage should have followed this excellent report but there were no follow-up media reports.

Too little, too late

In May 1998 the Therapeutic Goods Act was amended to abolish the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods AUST L listing system for health devices, after finally acknowledging that the devices regulations, which required no proof of efficacy, were seriously and dangerously misleading. In September 1999 the NSW Health Care Complaints Commission’s (HCCC) review of its Final Report into the *Listen* and similar *Interro* machines (and by implication similar skin sensing devices like *Mora*, *Vega*, *Theratest*, *Dermatrons*) found: “the *Listen* had no scientific basis - defies any logical rationale - is totally useless in diagnosing any health problem”. These findings were not made public.

What is disturbing, is that initially the HCCC found, on the assessment of one expert medical reviewer engaged by the HCCC, that “there was some valid scientific evidence to support some of the *Listen* claims and that orthodox trained medical and health practitioners should accept this evidence”, based on Dr Barbara Brewitt’s ‘research’ published in a USA *Journal of Naturopathy*.

Understandably, I was profoundly shocked by the findings which were sent to the offending *Listen* and *Interro* clinics.

Prof John Dwyer immediately protested and demanded the HCCC review its findings and appoint a panel of credible medical experts. To its credit the HCCC responded positively. Had this not been undertaken the NSW HCCC and NSW Health would have been subjected to national and international ridicule and use of their names by the international *Listen* industry to validate their dangerous claims. This complaints handling flaw should serve as



“Testing” with a *Listen* machine

a warning to all state government regulatory authorities.

Landmark case

In a landmark Federal Court test case in April 2000 the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) prosecuted a *Listen* distributor (who had appeared on the 1997 *Sunday* report into the original *Listen*) for claims he made for the newer *EQ4* and *Quickcheck* models of

Listen – finding that the claims made (which did *not* include screening for cancer and viruses and bacteria) were deceptive and misleading. The ACCC listed the *Listen* as a health fraud on its website. This ACCC case was to serve as the test case for all similar devices.

To date, this landmark ACCC case has never been reported by the mainstream or alternative health media. As a result, the *Listen* and similar devices industry has continued unaffected by the ACCC’s court case and remains unaccountable to the public. During 2000 one Sydney clinic promoted the *Listen* on its Cancer Support Options Website while another clinic’s breast cancer case study promotions detailed the *Listen*’s ability to determine a “cancer index which indicates the state of the disease”.

One high profile leader of the anti-immunisation lobby is featured in the frightening video, *Vaccination: The Hidden Truth*, as an independent nurse practitioner demonstrating her *Listen* machine test for “orthodox vaccine damage”. Its purpose is that parents be deterred from vaccinating their children. Many continue to dangerously title their *Listen* clinics as “Health Screening and Advanced Diagnostic and Allergy and Asthma Prevention clinics” offering computerised health checks, health analysis and assessments, some targeting children’s problems and others claiming, “safe and risk free for use on children”.

New devices

A new super-*Listen*, the *Omega Acubase* is now in clinics along with the older *Listen*-type machines *Interro* and the non-computerised earlier models of *Vega*, *Mora* and *Theratest* as well as many other types of skin sensing machines like

Decoder Dermagraphs, Dermatrons, Magnagraphs and Dielectric Diagnostic Analyzers, Bicoms, and "radionics" machines, and the latest, the TRD-CRT (see report the Skeptic 21:2), all complete with extravagant and potentially dangerous claims and used by qualified practitioners. They include the claim, "being non-invasive they are safe to use on children."

Foreign websites still promote newer *Listen* models, as being capable of screening for viruses and bacteria, organ and immune system function. One even included the claim that, "the *Listen* was registered in Australia as a medical device" (a dangerous legacy of the TGA's flawed ARG-T-AUST L listing system). These websites will continue to encourage the importation of the *Listen* machines and influence how they are promoted, sold, re-sold and used in Australia. What is important to remember is that these machines come with software that lists hundreds – thousands according to promotions – of viruses, bacteria and other infectious organisms. As such they are dangerous tools of deception in the hands of irresponsible operators.

Mixed results from regulators

In January 2001 the NSW Minister for Fair Trading, John Watkins, responded to my appeal to prosecute the *Listen* clinics under the new *Sub-*

stantiation of Claims Act, advising that "NSW FT will not be duplicating the ACCC's *Listen* 'test case' prosecution". This effectively means that from now on no authority will investigate or prosecute *Listen* and similar diagnostic skin sensing machine clinics and distributors.

As of July 2001, I am encouraged by reliable feedback that my latest submission to the NSW Minister for Health, Craig Knowles, appealing for a review of *Listen* type machine clinics, under new provisions of the NSW *Public Health Act*, has been received with concern and a commitment to seriously examine these issues.

Personal experience

Posing as a HIV positive person in December 1998 I was tested *over the phone* by a therapist and editor of a well known alternative health magazine, with his dowsing radionics device, and told I was now HIV negative and could discontinue my HIV drugs. This was after he had sold me a \$1400 *Regulator* device with specific frequencies to treat infectious diseases and cancers. He then requested a testimonial so he could publish it to "let others know". There are many electro-cure devices on the market that target infectious diseases and specifically mentioning children. That is another disturbing story that also begs to be told.

Conclusion

I am compelled to ask another question. How many more electronic viral, bacterial, pathogen screening devices are currently in use in clinics and how many more will be foisted onto the Australian health market in the future, all unknown to health authorities? It would take only one irresponsible operator to tell a HIV, hepatitis or STD positive person that he or she tested negative, to cause a public health disaster.

We have all the ingredients for such a disaster. If authorities do not act positively we will all be faced with reading awfully disturbing media headlines in the future. There is nothing more certain in my story. As of July 2001, no official public health warnings have ever been issued by state or federal health authorities.

References

"Crisis In Healthcare: The Devices Threat: Part 1" *the Skeptic* (21:2), Winter 2001

ACCC website: <http://www.accc.gov.au/media/mr2000/mr-78-00.htm> for landmark *Listen* case – April 2000

Medical Journal of Australia "Vega Testing in Diagnosis of Allergy by the Australian College of Allergy" – Vega has no scientific basis.

