

## Author's reply

BMJ 2011; 342 doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.d288> (Published 19 January 2011) Cite this as: BMJ 2011;342:d288

---

**John C McLachlan, associate dean of undergraduate medicine<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Durham University, Durham, UK*

[j.c.mclachlan@durham.ac.uk](mailto:j.c.mclachlan@durham.ac.uk)

---

Fried makes two points.<sup>1 2</sup> Firstly, that the abstract was accepted because of my credentials. But that was one of the points I was trying to make. My impression is that the world of alternative medicine is peculiarly susceptible to “arguments from authority,” while rational science and medicine ought to focus solely on evidence.

The second point relates to “fraud.” I would distinguish between fraud and “comic hoax,” with the distinction lying in intent. A comic hoax always intends to reveal the truth in time, but fraud is meant to remain secret. Hoax tactics can be legitimate, even when the subject is not comic. The subject of the “lie,” the idea that the buttocks map meaningfully to body organs is intrinsically risible to believers in rational medicine but not to believers in “alternative universe medicine.” One commentator on the internet said: “Once you open your mind wide enough to find reflexology or homoeopathy ‘not implausible,’ then you have no defence against any nonsense that might wander in”—this is a fair summary of my position.

I thought seriously about the ethical aspects and had helpful discussions with colleagues, friends, and *BMJ* editorial staff. But part of my motivation was to create a “true anecdote” as an antidote to the simplified and false anecdotes used in alternative universe medicine, increasingly disguised in integrative medicine clothing, and I hope I did this.

I did think about attending the conference and would have revealed the hoax during the presentation. I don't think it would have been one of the last conferences that I could have participated in. My motives for not attending were as described, and not as imputed by Fried.

Those who hold positions that are not supported by rational means cannot readily be challenged by rationality. How then to address these positions? Surely a little humour is not misplaced?

## Notes

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2011;342:d288

## Footnotes

- Competing interests: None declared.

## References

1. McLachlan JC. Integrative medicine and the point of credulity. *BMJ*2010;**341**:c6979. (8 December.)
2. Fried A. Professor McLachlan's fraud. *BMJ*2011;**342**:d289.