



Move with the Cheese



By Eleanor Rodgerson, MD

With the help of the book by Spencer Johnson, MD, *Who Moved My Cheese?*, I came to the conclusion that medical doctor advertising might not be so bad after all.

We have been too sensitive. Having lived through the lady-like and gentlemanly past years, disapproval of advertising one's abilities was inevitable. In those days only practitioners with little training, on the fringe of medical care, were the ones who advertised. Careful building of respect for accomplishments took time and that recognition did not come fast enough.

Through the years, however, advertising worked its way into every aspect of living. No matter what was desired, advertising should help. For money, of course. If, as a result, a product is purchased, or an idea accepted, or a practice acknowledged, there should be pay. So it was with many untrained medical practitioners.

This present increase in advertising among physicians was difficult for me to accept. Magazine articles page after page were now interrupted and cluttered with offerings not wanted. I stopped buying. Often newspapers confused the real news. When claims were boasted too far, the lawyers stepped in and, if there was to be profit, truth must be the goal. But, soon, the serious messages were slighted, and there was a search for cleverness, on a page, or moving, on the screen and TV.

Change came in the practice of medicine, but, for me, the prejudice against advertising remained. Those doctors who were trained did better work, had better results and, slowly but surely, raised their reputations. They did not need to advertise. That was still the way to do it.

Nevertheless, advertising increased profits. When managed care came along, its defects brought difficulties to the medical profession, dissatisfaction and loss of income. How to combat it? Some of the desperate became independent. And advertised.

I shrank at this advertising by professionals I knew to be at the top of their skills. Were they not belittling themselves?

Out of curiosity, I bought the small, best-seller management book, *Who Moved My Cheese?*, where blame was placed on everyone but the questioner. When I thought the idea over carefully, my point of view was somewhat changed, a shift in prejudice that seemed both practical and satisfactory.

What about the cheese? Well, the story goes, once upon a time there were two mice, Sniff and Scurry, and two little people "with brains," Hem and Haw, who lived in a Maze. They subsisted on cheese and eventually ate the first piece of cheese all up. The mice scampered around until they found new cheese. Hem and Haw expected more old cheese to reappear and almost starved while they waited. Finally, Haw stepped out and found the new cheese. He wrote his conclusions on the cheese room's wall. In the end, and in

jubilation, he penned his last declaration, "move with the cheese and enjoy it."

My own conclusion about the use of medical practitioner advertising ~ although difficult to accept ~ is that the publicity may, after all, be necessary to now endure private practice.

Rejecting advertising is impractical. After all, what do I know? There may even be more progress in managing health care. Advertising may not be part of the approaching decadence I had feared. Change can be a blessing.

ebr8809@aol.com

Sierra Sacramento Valley Medical Society
5380 Elvas Avenue #100 • Sacramento, CA 95819
916.452.2671 PH • 916.452.2690 FX • Email: info@ssvms.org

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