The Conflicts between Scientology and Western Medicine

By: Elizabeth Tejchma

Introduction

The religion of Scientology was developed by science fiction and fantasy writer, L. Ron Hubbard. Hubbard promoted his religion as one which “recognized man as basically good, offered tools for anyone to use to become happier and more able as a person, improved conditions in life for himself and others, and allowed individuals to gain a profound understanding of the Supreme Being and his relationship to the Divine.” The technologies of Scientology provided exact principles and practices for improving spiritual awareness, self-confidence, intelligence, and ability. The ultimate goal of a Scientologist is to reach freedom through spiritual enlightenment.

Though many of the claims brought forth by this group may seem rather fanciful and fictitious, nonetheless, there are many followers. There is a probability of a Scientologist seeking medical treatment in a physician’s office, hospital, or community pharmacy. Being able to expand one’s cultural competency by understanding the ideologies behind this religion will allow the healthcare provider to better assess the situation and react with the patient’s best interest in mind. This might be difficult given the strong beliefs and oppositions of such a patient. The challenge comes with finding a balance between the healthcare professional’s scientific training and the differing views of his or her patient. Increasing one’s sensitivity and knowledge about the subject is the only way to successfully find an outcome that will be mutually beneficial.

Ideologies of Scientology
Hubbard first published his ideologies related to mental health techniques in 1950. Its debut was in the magazine, *Astounding Science Fiction*. Later that year, Hubbard published three self help books that laid the founding ideologies for Scientology. *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health, Dianetics: The Evolution of Science, and Dianetics: The Original Thesis* were the first in a series of several books covering the topic of Dianetics or “an organized science of thought built on definite axioms, statements of natural laws on the order of those of the physical sciences.”

Supposedly, Dianetics spiritual healing technology could help “ease ailments of unwanted sensations and emotions, irrational fears, and stress-related illnesses.”

The word Dianetics was derived from two Greek stems. The first stem was dia, meaning through. The second was nous, meaning mind. The full and proper definition of Dianetics was “what the soul is doing to the body through the mind.”

Further research into the ideologies of Dianetics discovered Scientology, or “the study and handling of the spirit in relationship to itself, to universes and to other life.” Although Scientology was rooted in science, Hubbard saw it as more. He believed it to be a viable religion since the practice of Scientology could increase the individual’s spiritual awareness and ability to realize his own immortality. This immortal spiritual being, termed a thetan, possessed a mind and a body. The thetan lived through many past lives, sometimes on different planets and galaxies, and continued to live beyond the death of the body. In the 1960s, the guru decreed that humans were made of clusters of these thetans and were banished to earth some 75 million years ago by a cruel galactic ruler named Xenu.

Apart from the spiritual side, Scientology also met the three main criteria that were generally used by religious scholars when they examined the validity of religions. These criteria included “a belief in some Ultimate Reality, such as the Supreme Being or eternal truth
that transcends the here and now of the secular world; religious practices directed toward understanding, attaining or communicating with this Ultimate Reality; and a community of believers who join together in pursuing the Ultimate Reality.”

Prevalence of Scientologists

The first Church of Scientology opened in February of 1954 in Los Angeles, California. Its goal was to make “a civilization without insanity, without criminals, without war, where the able can prosper and honest beings can have rights, and where man is free to rise to greater heights.” This is a goal that many other religions also strive to attain.

The Church of Scientology has grown exponentially since its inception over fifty years ago. “It estimates membership at over 8 million followers in 159 countries.” In 2007, the Church claimed 3.5 million members in the United States, but according to a 2001 survey published by the City University of New York, “only 55,000 people would, if asked to identify their religion, have said Scientology.” Some of those willing to openly identify themselves as Scientologists include a laundry list of Hollywood A-listers: Tom Cruise, Katie Holmes, Kristie Alley, John Travolta, Chick Corea, Lisa Marie Presley and Beck are just some of the big names associated with this religion.

Scientology and Healthcare

Scientology has interesting views concerning several areas of healthcare. The punishment from the Church for defying these beliefs can range from a simple reprimand to revocation of membership. This is why it is important to be aware of these beliefs before recommending particular treatments.
Some of these areas include the vehement opposition to both psychiatry and psychology, the opposition to the use of any medication that may alter sensation in the body or psyche, alternative views on breastfeeding, and silent childbirth. The Church has set up various programs that assist members in attaining the recommended life choices. These programs/methods include “Assists” to aid in illness and injury and “Purification Rundown” for detoxification. These methods and views lack hard scientific data, but so do the claims from countless other religions. Before healthcare professionals write these patients off as ridiculous, consider practices of the Christian religion that might be seen to outsiders as different, even taboo.

**Psychiatry, Psychology, and Medications**

As stated previously, the Church of Scientology intensely opposes psychiatry and psychology. The opposition is focused on what they say are the practices of psychiatry and psychology. The following is a direct quote from the official website for Scientology:

What the Church opposes are brutal, inhumane psychiatric treatments. It does so for three principal reasons: procedures such as electro-shock, drugs, and lobotomy injure, maim, and destroy people in the guise of help; psychiatry is not a science and has no proven methods to justify the billions of dollars of government funds that are poured into it; and psychiatric theories that man is a mere animal have been used to rationalize, for example, the wholesale slaughter of human beings in WWI and WWII.¹

These harsh statements do not sit well with many in the medical community. Scientology has come under much backlash and criticism, especially from the American Psychiatric Association. Scientologists, hold that man is “a spiritual being and by the Creed of the Church, the healing of mentally caused ills should not be condoned in non-religious fields.”¹ These fields include, but are not limited to, psychiatry and pharmacology.
According to Hubbard, psychiatric practices “destroy minds and reduce man to a robotized and drugged state where he can be controlled.”² He also questioned why, despite psychiatry’s “vast absorption of government funds, crime, illiteracy, and drug addiction, social problems that would decline if psychiatry were doing its self-imposed job of handling the problems of the mind, continue to proliferate.”¹ When the Church was asked why Hubbard was against psychiatry, even when it was simply counseling sessions rather than shock therapy, lobotomies, and medications use, the Church had the following retort; “Even when psychiatric treatments do not tear apart living tissue, psychiatrists routinely tell their patients what they think is "wrong" with them, thus interjecting the psychiatrists’ own prejudices, preferences and falsehoods into the therapy and so denying the patient a chance of recovery.”³ A true therapy, like the ones the Church provides, would enable a person to find out for himself the source of his troubles and give him the ability to improve conditions in his own life, relationships and environment.

In 2005, actor and outspoken Scientologist, Tom Cruise, came under much public scrutiny after making slanderous statements about actress Brooke Shields. Shields wrote a memoir, which disclosed the fact that she used Paxil for severe postpartum depression. In an interview with Matt Lauer on the Today Show, Cruise made the following statement about depression and the unnecessary use of medications. “The antidepressant, all it does is mask the problem. There's ways, [with] vitamins and through exercise and various things. I'm saying that drugs aren't the answer, these drugs are very dangerous.”⁸ The Church supports such statements and promotes the thought that “drugs, regardless of the legality or them or reason for use, block off all sensations, the desirable ones with the unwanted.”¹ Scientology does however recognize
the short-term value of such medications in the handling of pain, but they say the “medications wipe out ability and alertness, and muddy one's thinking”.²

The Church takes a not-needed attitude towards illicit street drugs as well as certain prescribed medications. They consider methylphenidate to be as bad as illegal medications even when a child has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. They also lump pain killers into the same category as crack/cocaine, ecstasy, marijuana, and heroin. The Church distributes pamphlets to speak about the health risks involved with taking drugs, even if they are prescribed and used under the direct supervision of a medical doctor. The following is a quote taken from one of these pamphlets; it is titled “Kiddie Cocaine.”

The manufacturer says methylphenidate is a drug of dependency. Children on stimulant medications have twice the future rate of drug abuse. Long term effects include irreversible damage to the blood vessels of the heart and the brain; liver and lung damage; malnutrition and weight loss; disorientation, apathy, and damage to the brain including strokes and possible epilepsy. One-third of all child anorexia (eating disorders) are linked to use of this drug, as are symptoms of "obsessive-compulsive "behavior — within the first year of use. Also, a Texas researcher has also found that after only three months of Ritalin use, one out of twelve children treated with it had genetic abnormalities associated with an increased risk of cancer.¹¹

One problem with this pamphlet that is overwhelmingly obvious, has to due with the omission of any references for the statements made above. This pamphlet does not back up its data with any primary literature or substantiated research. This is quite alarming considering it was L. Ron Hubbard who conducted all of the research for the literature promoted by the Church of Scientology. L. Ron Hubbard is neither a physician nor a person trained in any medical field, yet he considered himself an expert in many healthcare professions.

**Alternative to Breastfeeding**
Perhaps L.Ron Hubbard never published, or even conducted any research into the things he was teaching, but others have. Most of the publications about Scientology found on PubMed were either German or Dutch in origin, thus making them unavailable to access from Wayne State University. However, there was one recent case study published in English. The following is an abstract from the case study written by Burk and Molodow in 2007. It is titled *Infantile scurvy: an old diagnosis revisited with a modern dietary twist.*

Ascorbic acid (vitamin C) is necessary for the formation of collagen, reducing free radicals, and aiding in iron absorption. Scurvy, a disease of dietary ascorbic acid deficiency, is uncommon today. Indeed, implementation of dietary recommendations largely eradicated infantile scurvy in the US in the early 1900s. We present a case of an otherwise healthy 2-year-old Caucasian girl who presented with refusal to walk secondary to pain in her lower extremities, generalized irritability, sleep disturbance, and malaise. The girl's parents described feeding the patient an organic diet recommended by the Church of Scientology that included a boiled mixture of organic whole milk, barley, and corn syrup devoid of fruits and vegetables. Physical examination revealed pale, bloated skin with edematous, violaceous gums and loosening of a few of her teeth. Dermatologic findings included xerosis, multiple scattered ecchymoses of the extremities, and perifollicular hemorrhage. Laboratory and radiographic evaluation confirmed the diagnosis of scurvy. The patient showed dramatic improvement after only 3 days of treatment with oral ascorbic acid and significant dietary modification. In this case report, we revisit the old diagnosis of scurvy with a modern dietary twist secondary to religious practices.  

The reason this 2 year old child was on such a strange liquid diet has to do with the Church’s belief about breastfeeding. They say that today’s mother, a modern woman, smokes, drinks, is nervous, and doesn’t eat properly. These habits make the breast milk unhealthy and unfit to meet the child’s nutritional needs. Instead, it is recommended that infants are given formula that consists of “15 ounces of barley water, 10 ounces of homogenized milk, 3 ounces of corn syrup (do not use lactose as a substitute), 2 ounces of honey may be used instead of corn syrup, if desired.” Supposedly this formula will deliver the correct ration of protein and
carbohydrates to the infants, thus making them happier and healthier. Apparently Hubbard learned of this recipe while he was in Ancient Rome, during a past life.

Immediately, all healthcare professionals should recognize major problems with this diet. The first problem has to do with the diet being devoid of all fruits and vegetables. This can cause numerous deficiencies. One such deficiency, scurvy, was addressed in the referenced article. Another issue had to do with the use of corn syrup in infants. It has a high likelihood of rotting their teeth. To get around this, Hubbard recommended that honey could be used as a sweetener. In infants, even a small amount of honey can cause Botulism, a potentially fatal disease. It is absurd to recommend administering honey to children under the age of 12 months. The last major issue arose with the statement that Hubbard’s formula was superior to regular formula and even breast milk. This statement is obviously false for more than one reason. The most obvious reason has to do with the passive immunity breast milk provides the infant. This always makes breast milk the most advantageous option.

No medical expert would ever recommend alternative practices such as those listed above. They blatantly put infants in harms way. It is one thing if a parent wants to believe and follow certain practices, but it is a whole other issue when these practices cause harm to the child. The healthcare provider should be sensitive to the desires of the patient for religious freedom, but also mindful of the child’s rights for basic needs to be met. The child’s human rights always supercede the adult’s infliction of religious rights. Sometimes this means proper authorities must be contacted and necessary legal avenues explored.
Silent Birth

Another peculiar aspect of healthcare related to the Scientologist has to do with the practice of silent birth. The name fully implies its nature. This method was highly publicized in the media when Katie Holmes and Tom Cruise were expecting their first child.

A silent birth is all about providing the best possible environment for the birthing mother and her new baby. Labor and delivery are done in a calm and loving environment. Everyone attending the birth refrains from spoken words as much as possible. Chatty doctors and nurses, shouts to “PUSH, PUSH” and loud or laughing remarks to husbands are the types of noises that are meant to be avoided. The idea of silent birth is based on L. Ron Hubbard’s research into the mind and spirit. He found that words spoken during moments of pain and unconsciousness can have adverse effects on an individual later in life. What has been said during traumatic experiences such as birth records in a part of the mind called the reactive mind. These recordings store and have the power to influence a person by dictating thoughts, emotions and psychosomatic ills not under his control. Anyone can read about this in the book Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health. Mothers naturally want to give their baby the best possible start in life and thus need to keep the birth as quiet as possible.

Things are not completely silent rather only words cannot be said. Mother’s are free to grunt. Once again, drugs such as epidurals or medications that induce labor are strongly discouraged. Many doctors will not subscribe to such rules in their operating rooms, therefore, Scientologist’s usually seek out doctors who are also Scientologists so that their wishes will be met. Cue cards and hand signals are used as a means of communication. Usually a rehearsal delivery is performed so everyone knows what their role is and how to be effective in that role without speaking.

Assists

Since the beginning of time, religion has been used to attempt to relieve man’s physical suffering. Techniques to relieve such pain have ranged from prayer to the laying on of hands. Many superstitions arose to account for their occasional effectiveness. Regardless of location or religion, many hold the belief that the spirit can have an effect on the body, no matter what
method is used. Today, medicine treats the body when there is something wrong with it rather than looking at the big picture. More often than not, medicine overlooks the relationship between the spiritual being and the body. This is the fundamental difference between Eastern and Western Medicine.

"Unhappiness, inability to heal, and psychosomatic illnesses, which include some 70 percent of the illnesses of man, are best handled by immediate address of the thetan." Scientologists do recognize that illness caused by recognizable bacteria and injury due to accidents are best treated by physical means. These physical means fall into the field of medicine, and are not governed by Scientology. However, Scientologists believe that "accidents, illness, and bacterial infection are predetermined in almost all cases by spiritual malfunction and unrest, and conditions in accidents are definitely prolonged by any spiritual malfunction."

Since illness and injury were caused by the thetan, L. Ron Hubbard took a more holistic approach. He believed that the individual had an enormous capacity to influence the body and its well-being. He developed numerous applications for his discoveries of the mental and spiritual aspects of a person’s physical difficulties. The discoveries were termed "Assists". According to Hubbard, "Assists always help and often have miraculous results."

Throughout his life, L.Ron Hubbard “discovered” hundreds of assist techniques. Scientologists distribute a booklet that teaches the common ones. These include the contact assist, touch assist, nerve assist, and unconscious person assist. The booklet explains why each one is used and how to properly perform each assist. The premise of the Contact Assist lays in the evolutionary fact that one of life’s basic reactions is to avoid places where one has been hurt. After any major issues are taken care of, the person performing the assist takes the injured person
back to the location where the accident took place. The injured person is made to relive the experience and does exactly what he was doing when the injury was sustained. The injured person touches the spot he injured and then touches the exact spot of what injured him. He repeats this action until the pain is gone. When the pain dissipates, this is called somatic blowing. The person assisting in the assist then says “End of assist.” This is an example of spiritual or psychosomatic self healing. The theory of this technique’s effectiveness has to do with allowing the person to no longer fear getting injured in that location again. He is allowed to feel the pain and relive the moment, thus setting him free from any residual apprehension involved with the incident.

The purposes of the Touch Assist, Nerve Assist, and Unconscious Person Assist are to reestablish communication with injured or ill areas of the body. With the Touch Assists, repetitively touching the ill or injured person’s body and putting him into communication with the injury brings the person’s attention to the injured or affected body areas. The Nerve Assist works by reestablishing nerve conduction via touching the nerves of the spine in a massage pattern. Once attention is brought to the illness, site of injury, or area of injury, the body is then able to heal because communication is reestablished and circulation and nerve conduction resume.

The Unconscious Person Assist works a little differently. It is said to bring a comatose person back to reality by simply touching their hand to objects around them. The person performing the assist should look for signs of improvement and continue to do the assist each day until the person wakes up.
Purification Rundown

The Purification rundown is a program that results in detoxification. It is a combination of exercise, sauna use, high doses of vitamins, and nutrition. The program usually takes about 3 weeks to complete. In 1960, Hubbard “made the discovery that residues from drugs and other toxins lodge in the fatty tissues of the body and stay there, even years after they have been ingested, and that these residues can continue to affect the individual adversely long after the effect of the drug has apparently worn off. Such deposits have been known to cause lessened perception, tiredness, confused thinking and a host of other symptoms – all of which are counter to what is being achieved through auditing. Documented cases show that an individual may reexperience the effects of LSD years after having taken the drug. Realizing that this biochemical factor had to be handled before any lasting spiritual gain could be made through auditing, L. Ron Hubbard devised what independent researchers acknowledge as the safest, most effective and only detoxification program of its kind.”

The exercise portion of the purification rundown includes vigorous running for thirty minutes to stimulate and increase circulation. This intense exercise “gets blood circulating into deeper tissues where toxic residues are lodged, thus loosening and releasing accumulated deposits.” These sessions of running must be followed by at least four hours of sweating in a sauna. Hubbard believed that sweating was the mechanism of excretion for the toxins.

Spending four hours in a sauna brought about excessive fluid loss and electrolyte imbalances. To combat these negative effects, Hubbard concocted a schedule of adequate rehydration and megavitamin intake. No guidelines for fluid intake are recommended, just drink...
enough fluids to remain well hydrated. On the other hand, the vitamin schedule is clearly spelled out. A person going through the purification process must follow this schedule precisely for the detoxification to be effective.

When a person has reached Stage V of his or her purification treatment, (time frame is not specified since it is individualized for each patient) the list of vitamins he or she is required to take is enormous. Hubbard has the patients take mega amounts of vitamins six times a day. The following tables are his recommendations on daily intake.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Niacin</th>
<th>VitA</th>
<th>VitD</th>
<th>VitC</th>
<th>VitE</th>
<th>VitB complex</th>
<th>VitB1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3500-5000mg</td>
<td>50,000 IU</td>
<td>2,000 IU</td>
<td>5-6 grams</td>
<td>2400 IU</td>
<td>6 tablets</td>
<td>800-1200mg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*3

According to the Cleveland Clinic, the following chart contains the reported upper limit and/or toxic levels of the same vitamins.18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Niacin</th>
<th>VitA</th>
<th>VitD</th>
<th>VitC</th>
<th>VitE</th>
<th>VitB complex</th>
<th>VitB1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6000mg</td>
<td>15,000 IU</td>
<td>40,000 IU</td>
<td>2 grams</td>
<td>1000 IU</td>
<td>2000-5000 mg of B6</td>
<td>800-1200mg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*14

High niacin doses can cause liver damage, hyperglycemia, and elevated uric acid levels as seen in gout. Excessive Vitamin A intake can cause headache, blurred vision, and promote osteoporosis. Consumption of excessive Vitamin C can cause impaired absorption of B-12 and increase the likelihood of getting kidney stones. High Vitamin E intake can cause coagulopathies and increased risk of hemorrhagic stroke. Increased B6 ingestion can cause dysfunction in the central nervous system. Any educated healthcare professional would be hesitant to ever recommend a regimen akin to the one listed above.
Excessive mineral intake is also required on top of the huge vitamin consumption. Once again, the mandatory intake of minerals for a person in Stage V of the purification process is listed below. The extent of toxicity would be based upon the deficiency in each person. Without having up to date lab draws, it would be impossible to safely allow this regimen, let alone assess any potential toxicities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ca</th>
<th>Mg</th>
<th>Fe</th>
<th>Zn</th>
<th>Mn</th>
<th>Cu</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2500-3000</td>
<td>1250-1500</td>
<td>90-108</td>
<td>75-90</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>225-270</td>
<td>1.125-1.350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*3

Other components of this program appear to be safer. These include sufficient sleep and proper nutrition. The nutrition portion consists of plenty of vegetables that have not been overcooked and using vegetable oil rather than animal oils. It is recommended that one should stick to a natural diet, using whole (unprocessed) foods. All foods should be organically grown.

Celebrities such as Kristie Alley have used the above program to overcome drug addiction. This program is called Narcnon and was developed by the Church of Scientology. The Church emphatically insists this program works and has a huge success rate. It also says “alcohol withdrawal symptoms can be effectively managed with mega vitamins alone.”*3 Most healthcare professionals would tend to disagree since vitamins do not effectively target the benzodiazepine receptor on the mu receptor. When that receptor is no longer blocked, the alcoholic can display signs of withdrawals, even seizure. Again, vitamins would do nothing to control such possibly fatal seizures.
Arguments

Personally, I can see valid arguments for both sides. The Church encourages a healthy lifestyle and teachings that encompass the whole person. They believe exercise is as important as spiritual cleansing to find well being. Many people could be drawn into this seemingly positive message. On the other hand, the Church has members participate in irrefutably dangerous practices. These practices include harm to infants by denying them proper nutrition. It also condones harm to the member via promotion of ingestion of megavitamins, excessive sauna sessions, and lack of sometimes needed pharmacological treatment. Also, objective verification of Hubbard’s doctrine is lacking. To date no scientific entity has ever established the validity of his theories. Therefore, the practices that are obviously unhealthy should be discouraged by medical professionals.

Conclusion

Like it or not, Scientology is here to stay. Some say it’s a kooky, fantastical pseudo-religion. Others swear by its positive effects in their lives. Regardless of what we may think as healthcare professionals, we must remain sensitive to the needs and requests of all our patients.

Endnote

I polled many healthcare professionals in both the community and hospital setting about any situations they had with Scientologists and how they dealt with it. To date, not one person has ever run into an issue with a Scientologist refusing recommended treatment; therefore, I was unable to report any conclusive results about how to effectively communicate with these patients, or how to individualize treatment based upon their needs. This may be due to the fact that
approximately a mere 55,000 people actually admit to being Scientologist. Another factor that I hypothesized is that perhaps, in Michigan, the prevalence is not as high as in a state like California.

Another issue I had concerned my desire to interview a Scientologist about their beliefs regarding healthcare. I sent multiple emails to several different churches in Michigan. It felt like I had been blacklisted. Maybe my name was forwarded to the other churches to let them know that I was looking for information and not to talk to me, or perhaps it was the fact that I was a pharmacy student. I got the hint that they did not like anyone in the industry that had to do with pharmaceuticals. I never did get my interview or some of my questions answered. I was however referred to a website where I could “purchase courses to increase my knowledge.”

Later I learned that this is how questions are dealt with; a member must purchase more and more courses to be looked upon favorably and to elevate their rank in the Church. I find this very peculiar. Everywhere I turned I got solicited to buy books, pamphlets, brochures, courses, etc. I ended up seeing why Hubbard turned his ideologies into a religion; it pays a heck of a lot more. This research project left me with a bad taste in my mouth when it comes to Scientology.
References

1) Scientology – Church of Scientology Official Site. 2007. www.scientology.org


14) http://www.clevelandclinic.org/health/health-info/docs/3300/3393.asp?index=9763&src=newsp

