



It sometimes seems to me that I cannot get through a CME meeting or read a 'best practice' publication without being exhorted to 'aggressively manage' something or other. Am I the only one out of step, the only doc at the meeting left choking on his hors d'oeuvre? What's up with medical practice when such a metaphor has become so ubiquitous?

A semantic quibble? I don't think so. Our metaphors not only reflect our attitudes, they can also shape our attitudes. The expression 'aggressive management' implies a separation of the disease (or more commonly the 'risk factors') from the person. When we adopt such a separation, we lose sight of the person and lapse back into the old reductionist biomedical model.

American journalist and commentator Lynn Payer, in a paper published in 1990,¹ summed up the 'culture' of American medicine in one word: aggressive.

I wonder what she would say of New Zealand's medical culture in 2007. Am I being alarmist or is thirty-something years of progress towards a more humanistic paradigm of health and healing now under threat from the zealous advocates of 'aggressive management'?

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Reference

1. Payer L. Borderline Cases: How Medical Practice Reflects National Culture. *The Sciences* 1990; 30(4): 38-42
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Does folic acid supplementation reduce the risk of vascular diseases?

*Combined Clinical Outcomes of Folic-Acid Supplementation in 12 RCTs**

Outcome	Relative Risk	95% CI
Cardiovascular diseases	0.95	0.88 – 1.03
Coronary heart disease	1.04	0.92 – 1.17
Stroke	0.86	0.71 – 1.04
All-cause mortality	0.96	0.88 – 1.04

* RCT indicates randomized controlled trial; and CI, confidence interval.

Source: *JAMA* 2006; 296:2720–2726.