

A Critical Look at Gary Young, Young Living Essential Oils, and Raindrop Therapy [extracts]

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In the spring of 2002, an acquaintance of mine excitedly told me of a healer who could use essential oils and natural therapies to treat a family member's precancerous growth. The relative would then be spared surgery recommended by specialists at a university affiliated medical center.

It sounded too good to be true. I decided to investigate. This article describes what I uncovered about the healer, self-styled naturopath Donald Gary Young, his multi-level marketing company Young Living Essential Oils, his Young Life Research Clinic Institute of Natural Medicine, and his special technique called Raindrop Therapy.

Background

Donald Gary Young, also known as Don Gary Young, D. Gary Young, and Gary Young, was born in Salmon, Idaho on July 11, 1949. He graduated from the Challis, an Idaho high school on May 23, 1967 [1]. This is only legitimate educational credential that I have been able to verify.

In 1981 Young moved to Spokane and opened the Golden Six Health Club in Sprague, Washington. Although he had no training in obstetrics or midwifery, he decided to deliver his wife's baby underwater in a whirlpool bath at the health club. He left the baby under water for almost an hour, causing the death of an apparently healthy infant on Sept 4, 1982. Although the coroner said that the baby would have lived if she had been delivered in a conventional manner, Young was never charged in that case. His plans for an underwater delivery the previous year had been thwarted when a health department caseworker threatened to prosecute him if he followed through with the plan [2-6].

In March 1983, Young was arrested in Spokane for practicing medicine without a license when he offered to provide an undercover agent with prenatal services and to treat her mother for cancer. He claimed falsely to be a graduate of "The American Institute of Physioregenerology". But the institute's owner said that Young attended only a few classes, did only 1/3 of the homework, and owed \$1,800 in tuition [2-6]. The prosecuting attorney's statement of charges in the case said:

UNLAWFUL PRACTICE OF MEDICINE committed as follows: That the defendant, Donald Gary Young, in Spokane County, Washington, on or about February 24, 1983, then and there being, did then and there offer or undertake to diagnose, advise or prescribe for a human physical condition, or offer to penetrate the tissue of another human being, by means as follows: offering to deliver a baby of another person; by offering to treat another person for cancer and to detect the presence of cancer in another by means of a blood sample which he would draw and by a blood test which he would interpret; and by offering to determine the nutritional needs of another person during pregnancy by drawing blood and interpreting the results of a blood test; the defendant at such time not having a valid unrevoked license to practice medicine. [8]

Young pleaded guilty to the unlawful practice of medicine and was sentenced to a year of probation.

From Spokane, Young moved to Mexico. By this time he had divorced Donna and married his second wife, Dixie. In Mexico, Young ran a clinic for the treatment of cancer with laetrile [9]. Laetrile is a fraudulent cancer treatment that is both ineffective and dangerous.

After Mexico, Young, claiming then to be a physician, established a clinic in Chula Vista, California. He was arrested in California in 1988 for misleading and deceptive advertising and for selling supposed cures [10-12]. An undercover agent submitted a sample of her blood with a fictitious male name for the bogus “blood crystallization” test also known as “live blood cell analysis”. Young reportedly told her that she had prostate cancer with cells that could act in a “potentially aggressive manner”. Other charges against Young included selling unapproved medical devices and unapproved new drugs, manufacturing medical devices and drugs without a license, advertising drugs and devices to cure cancer, and practicing medicine without a license.

By 1992, Young had divorced Dixie and married his third wife, Mary Billeter Young. He then started his current multilevel marketing company, Young Living Essential Oils (YLEO).

Young’s biographical sketch on the YLEO website and a multitude of independent distributor websites describes Young as a naturopath and praises him as “one of North America’s foremost authorities on essential oils”. He states that Bernadean University awarded him a masters degree in nutrition in 1984 and a doctor of naturopathy degree in 1985. However, Bernadean is a notorious mail-order diploma mill that has never been authorized to grant degrees.

Young is not licensed, nor has he ever been licensed, as a naturopath in Utah or in any other state [13]. In April 2002, the Young Living website used the title N.D. (naturopathic doctor) after Young’s name and stated that Young was a naturopath. I telephoned Young Living on April 2, 2002, and asked whether Young was licensed to practice naturopathy in Utah. The person I spoke with said that he was. I then asked for his license number. Although the website of the Utah Division of Professional Licensing (USOPL) lists the numbers of all licensed naturopaths, the Young Living employee said they could not give it out. After I complained to the UDOPL, Young Living removed the title N.D. and references to Young as a naturopath from the its website, but this misleading information still appears all over the Internet on distributor websites.

That is the background of Gary Young. He is a man with no training, with inflated credentials, and a history of arrests for health fraud. Now let’s examine his company.

Young Living Essential Oils

Young and his third wife Mary Billeter Young started Young Living Essential Oils (YLEO) in Utah in 1992. A biographical sketch describes her as previously quite successful at a multilevel marketing company [14], which I believe was Sunrider International. Building on her experience, the Youngs established YLEO as a typical MLM company in which “independent distributors” are said to earn money by selling products and by earning a percentage of the sales of the distributors they recruit.

The company justifies high prices by claiming that its products are purer than those of its competitors, but it provides no comparative information to support these assertions.

In a 1995 training video, Young states that he persuaded a reluctant user to try his oils by “appealing to his ego,” assuring him that he would “make history” [15]. One current user of YLEO products told me confidently that when Young cured his serious disease with essential oils, he would “make history.” This suggests that Young continues to deliberately manipulate his customers.

Young Life Research Clinic Institute of Natural Medicine

In October 2000, Young opened the ambitiously named Young Life Research Clinic Institute of Natural Medicine in Springville, Utah. Since he had run into legal trouble over his lack of a license in two other states, he needed licensed doctors to staff his clinic and to carry out his idiosyncratic brand of healing. The two doctors he employed are Roger Belden Lewis, M.D., a board certified family physician, and Sherman Johnson, M.D., a pediatrician who is not board certified. I wrote to Dr. Lewis asking about the training and credentials of the clinic staff, but he never replied.

The Utah Division of Professional Licensing (DOPL) web page shows that Johnson has a disciplinary record. A DOPL representative told me by telephone that Johnson's license was suspended from 1994 to 1999 for felony medical misconduct related to the misprescribing of narcotics. With that record, he would probably be unable to be credentialed to practice at a hospital or to participate as a provider with medical insurance plans.

Two archived articles in the Salt Lake City Tribune provide more details [16,17]. These reports state that Johnson was married for 28 years but also had a girlfriend named Donna Jones for 14 years. Jones was mentally ill with multiple personality disorder, and Johnson acted as her doctor even though (a) pediatricians normally don't treat adults or people with serious mental problems, and (b) romantic involvement with a patient is considered unwise and unprofessional and, in many states, is grounds for disciplinary action.

Jones apparently believed that she had cancer. She didn't, but she shaved her head and toted an oxygen tank to look the part. And she became addicted to narcotics prescribed by Johnson for her nonexistent cancer pain. In fact, in the final six months of her life Johnson prescribed 386,000 milligrams of Demerol, an enormous dose. Eventually Johnson injected her with a lethal overdose of Demerol and she died in his arms. He falsified the death certificate and she was buried. Later, a nurse raised suspicions. The body was exhumed, the overdose confirmed, and no evidence of cancer found. Asked why he never ordered any tests or work up for cancer, Johnson said that tests were unnecessary because his friend wouldn't lie to him. She had told him that the cancer was injected into her body by "a coven of gay witches and doctors".

Johnson avoided a homicide trial by pleading guilty to manslaughter. In a presentencing hearing, the district attorney recommended a sentence of 1 to 15 years in the state penitentiary. Instead, the judge sentenced him to a mere 90 days in the county jail. was also fined \$12,500.

How does the Young Life Research Clinic operate? I ordered a set of eight case histories [18] presented at the June 2002 Young Living Grand Convention. These confirmed what I had surmised. The patient is asked to bring real medical records to the initial consultation. This supplies the clinic with the established medical diagnosis. Then the clinic doctors perform a variety of quack tests. The patient is then given some new bogus diagnoses such as "low immune function," "poor nutrition," and/or "parasites." Of course, large quantities of essential oils and nutritional supplements sold only by Young Living are required. The bogus diagnostic tests are repeated and the patient pronounced better. Of course, to maintain the new-found health, the patient is advised to continue using Young's products.

The eight case reports that I received were not presented in the scientific manner or format used for standard medical reports. All lacked complete histories, explanations for the diagnostic tests chosen, alternative diagnoses considered, and rational explanations for the treatments selected. Seven of the cases included identifying information about the patients — actual names, birth dates, occupations, etc. I searched the Internet and determined that two of the eight had died less than four months after the presentation.

Raindrop Therapy

Young claimed that Raindrop Therapy could effectively treat scoliosis by affecting toxins and viruses, which he said cause scoliosis [19]. There is no scientific basis to this claim because there is no evidence that either viruses or toxins cause scoliosis. However, the undiluted oils can cause a burning sensation and skin redness, which the raindrop therapist alleges are evidence that viruses and toxins are leaving the body. In actuality, it is only a local skin reaction to irritation.

Raindrop Therapy uses seven single essential oils plus two blends formulated by YLEO. The concentrations of several oils exceed recommended safe doses and can cause skin irritation, sensitization, phototoxicity, and essential oil toxicity. A thorough analysis of the potential problems associated with each of the oils is detailed in the National Association of Holistic Aromatherapists' White Paper on Young Living Oil's Raindrop Therapy [20].

Most Raindrop Therapy practitioners are Young Living independent distributors who learned the technique from brief seminars and training tapes. Such therapists may have no other formal training and thus lack the capacity to recognize complications of the treatment. Many claim that Raindrop Therapy is effective against a variety of medical conditions. Young even advocates using Raindrop Therapy in veterinary medicine, especially for horses [21]. But there is no evidence that Raindrop Therapy is effective for any human or animal medical condition.

Young claims that he developed Raindrop Therapy in part from the teachings of the Lakota Sioux medicine man Wallace Black Elk. However, Black Elk's assistant told me that Black Elk did not collaborate in any way with Young to develop the technique, did not teach any specific massage strokes as alleged by Young on his Raindrop Therapy videotape, and does not endorse Raindrop Therapy [22].

Summary

Gary Young is an uneducated huckster with a track record of arrests for health fraud. He has repeatedly inflated and falsified his education and credentials. His inability to recognize the limits of his knowledge and training contributed to the death of his own child. Sherman Johnson, M.D., medical director of The Young Life Research Clinic, deliberately administered a lethal dose of narcotics to a long-time friend, and then attempted to cover his actions by falsifying the death certificate. There is no reason to believe that either Young or Johnson has sufficient judgment, skill, or ethics to appropriately care for seriously ill patients.

Patients visiting the Young Life Research clinic can waste large sums of money on worthless treatments, and will gain only false hope. Patients risk being guided away from effective legitimate medical treatments. At best, their life will be needlessly complicated by the prescription of elaborate irrational regimens requiring overpriced products sold only by Young Living. At worst, patients may suffer direct harm from the misuse of essential oils and other dubious treatments.

Essential oils for aromatherapy use are available from many suppliers who do not make ridiculous claims and whose prices are not inflated by dubious multilevel marketing practices.

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