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### *Who Is Info-Cult*

Founded in 1980, Info-Cult is a non-profit charity organization that helps people concerned or interested about cults, new religious movements and related phenomena.

Our services include :

an information and assistance phone line, consultation, research, conferences, documentation centre and an internet site.

## News from Info-Cult

No 12, February 2009

### Alternative Therapies

In October 2008, a Radio-Canada TV program, *Enquête*,<sup>1</sup> focused on *Biologie Totale (Total Biology)* - a practice that claims that illnesses, such as cancer and AIDS, are responses to personal stress and that the brain can switch off the illness as soon as the conflict is resolved.

One story in particular during the broadcast was all too familiar, a woman with breast cancer who followed the teachings of *Biologie totale*, refused to seek traditional medical help, and eventually died. In a previous *News from Info-Cult* (February 2008, #10),<sup>2</sup> we mentioned a similar story of a woman whose mother had breast cancer and refused to go for medical treatment. What we didn't indicate at the time was that her mother was a follower of *Biologie Totale*.

These types of situations are not infrequent and, as noted above, can lead to life - threatening situations for the believer and cause much suffering for the non-believing family members. As this case of *Biologie Totale* demonstrates, followers do not necessarily have to believe a religious dogma to become devoted followers of a person, practice or theory.

In the days following the TV program, the College of Physicians and the Orders of Chiropractors and Nurses issued press releases<sup>3</sup> stating that *Biologie Totale* was non-scientific and therefore not a recognized practice. In addition, if any of their members were involved they encouraged the public to call and make a complaint.

These declarations by the professional associations are an important step in alerting the public to *Biologie Totale*. However, convincing believers or those who may be potential consumers, to avoid these kinds of "alternative" treatments is not so simple. In the face of what may appear to be overriding evidence to the contrary, those who truly believe, or want to believe, will not be easily swayed by facts.

There are different reasons why people are open to alternative or new treatments and other belief systems. Unless these reasons are addressed, media exposures and press releases will have a limited impact.

People are more open to "alternative" treatments because of a complex mix of factors, including a desire to take control over one's health, desperation, rejection of science and /or disillusionment with conventional health-care.<sup>4</sup>

In some cases, people need to believe there exists a simple magical solution to physical ailments rather than face the uncertainty and lack of guarantees that traditional health care professions offer.

At Info-Cult we do not view everything new or different as problematic; neither do we see established practices as problem free. We find it interesting that often those who are willing to criticize traditional health care practices do not seem to apply the same critical assessment to new "treatments". It seems as if any opposition to established medical practices only strengthens the conviction of these proponents of alternative treatments and that their fancy and miraculous claims are somehow beyond reproach.

There is no simple solution to getting people to make judicious choices. Providing the public with objective information, exposing the harms when they occur and encouraging and teaching critical thinking are the first steps towards minimizing any potential harm.

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1. There were two programs *Biologie Totale: Menace Fatale* and *Biologie Totale: Menace Fatale 2*. Both can be accessed via our website at: <http://infosect.freeshell.org/infocult/ic-events.html>

See – **Programs Already Broadcast**. Both programs were still available at the time this bulletin was published.

2. See <http://infosect.freeshell.org/infocult/IC-2008-No10-News-webversion.pdf>

3. **Press Releases** :

Collège des médecins du Québec <http://www.newswire.ca/fr/releases/archive/October2008/08/c4173.html>

L'Ordre des chiropraticiens du Québec

<http://www.cnw.ca/fr/releases/archive/October2008/03/c2989.html>

L'Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec

<http://www.cnw.ca/fr/releases/archive/October2008/08/c4482.html>

4. Ernst, E., *Unproven or Disproven Treatments – Why Would Anyone Want to Use Them?*, Skeptical Inquirer Volume 32, No. 6, Nov/Dec 2008, p. 13

## Education

**Upcoming Seminar in Montreal** : Info-Cult in collaboration with Plaidoyer Victimes and CINR (Centre d'Information sur les Nouvelles Religions) is organizing a 2 day Seminar April 2 -3 (in French) at the Université de Montréal entitled « Du croire à l'extrême et des pratiques sectaires: prendre en compte et intervenir ». More details will be forthcoming shortly.

**Info-Cult's President** Carolle Tremblay has given a number of presentations the last couple of years and of recent note was one given at the University of Sherbrooke "Les droits de l'enfant en milieu sectaire: Mythe ou réalité?" (The Rights of Children in a Cultic Milieu: Myth or Reality). The flyer describing the session is available here: [http://infosect.freeshell.org/infocult/tremblay\\_reduit.pdf](http://infosect.freeshell.org/infocult/tremblay_reduit.pdf)

**International Conference in Geneva**: Info-Cult is collaborating with ICSA (International Cultic Studies Association) in organizing the next Annual conference to be held July 2 – 4, 2009 in Geneva, Switzerland. Details about the agenda, presenters, how to register and more can be found [here](http://www.icsahome.com/infoserv_conferences/conference_home_2009_geneva.asp). ([http://www.icsahome.com/infoserv\\_conferences/conference\\_home\\_2009\\_geneva.asp](http://www.icsahome.com/infoserv_conferences/conference_home_2009_geneva.asp))

## Info-Cult Web Site

Visit our web site regularly for the latest additions.

During the past few months a number of documentaries and other TV and radio programs have been broadcast. A few of them are still viewable online. They can be accessed from the PROGRAMS ALREADY BROADCAST - ACCESSIBLE ONLINE section on the following page: <http://infosect.freeshell.org/infocult/ic-events.html>

In addition, recent government reports and other documents can be found on our **Government Reports, Legal Decisions, etc.** page: <http://infosect.freeshell.org/infocult/ic-gov.html>



Info-Cult is a non-profit charitable organization and as such relies on the generosity of individual donors for an important part of its funding. If you would like to support Info-Cult you can make a donation through CanadaHelps:



or by check to Info-Cult, 5655 Park Ave. #208, Montreal, QC H2V 4H2

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