In a piercing analysis Dr. Offit takes on the alternative medicine industry and its supporters. By the title of the book, it is clear Dr. Offit has some serious criticisms of the supplement, vitamin, and herbal treatments. His premise is this: Treatments for illness or for prevention of illness are either proven through clinical studies or they are not. In other words, there is no such thing as an alternative medicine. Something is medicine or it is not.

Dr. Offit is a great story teller and, in a highly readable fashion, debunks some of the myths of alternative medicine. He says most are totally ineffective and have no clinical evidence that they do what they claim. Much of the problem is that supplements are regulated differently than drugs. The FDA cannot regulate natural products the way they regulate drugs. Supplements can make all kinds of claims not allowed by drug makers. Dr. Offit says this difference was forced on regulators by a compliant Congress willing to give naturals a regulatory pass.

Dr. Offit takes on the celebrity endorsers who always push these alternatives. He criticizes one of the most beloved television physicians, Dr. Oz, for touting alternatives not clinically proven. His wrath is strong for the diet and life extension celebrities, like Suzanne Somers, for pushing their diet regimens which have no scientific basis for success. These celebrities are great salespeople, says Dr. Offit, but are engaging in phony claims based on no clinical evidence.

In fact, Dr. Offit claims many of these supplements are downright dangerous in large quantities. Mega dosing vitamins can actually cause disease. Just because they are on the shelves of a GNC store does not make them safe to take. Many of these supplements contain the same ingredients as approved prescription drugs, but without the assurance of the appropriate dose or purity of ingredients.

Dr. Offit is most angry at the celebrities who push avoidance of vaccines. Jenny McCarthy, not noted for her medical background, decided that vaccines cause autism. She started a movement to tell parents the dangers of vaccines. Thus, many parents decided to avoid certain common vaccines and now we have a resurgence of cases of childhood diseases. There is no evidence vaccines cause autism, but that does not stop the celebrity parade of alternative treatments.

Dr. Offit says most alternatives are a waste of money. Those include saw palmetto for prostates, chondroitin for knee cartilage, and mega doses of vitamin C for colds. Some do work, such as calcium and vitamin D for healthy bones, and folic acid for preventing birth defects.

Why do some people swear by many of these alternatives? Dr. Offit credits the placebo effect. It works and people do report feeling better when they take what they are told works. The placebo effect will not replace real cures, however. Dr. Offit tells us the case of Steve Jobs, who had a controllable pancreatic cancer. He spent a year taking alternative treatments and by then his cancer spread and was inoperable. Dr. Offit says when a Steve Jobs is fooled into trying unproven alternatives, most of us are, too.

Dr. Offit I am sure will be vilified by the alternatives industry but his analysis is well-written, supported by clinical evidence and quite reasonable. What is clear is somehow we look for natural alternatives in preference to synthetic compounds. There seems to be something in our makeup that longs for “natural” solutions used for hundreds of years. Dr. Offit says we have ways to prove or disprove their effectiveness using double blind clinical studies. Few are proven using the scientific method and remain anecdotal successes.

Robert Ehrlich, chairman and chief executive of DTC Perspectives Inc., regularly reviews books about the pharmaceutical industry, marketing and advertising for DTC Perspectives Magazine. He also writes a weekly e-newsletter providing insights on pharmaceutical marketing trends. To subscribe to this FREE weekly analysis, sign up at the website, www.DTCPerspectives.com. Ehrlich can be reached by email at Bob@DTCPerspectives.com.