

Dear Dr. Bortz. I am the luckiest of people and the unluckiest of people. I am in my early 60s and healthy. I am lucky that I still have my mother, who is 88 and a source of strength and great memories. Unfortunately, she is ravaged by Alzheimer's disease and is in bed and mute most of the time. Is there anything out there that gives hope? – Jane Belleau, Coatesville, Pennsylvania

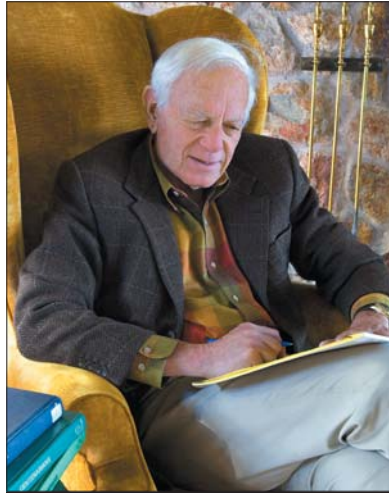
Dear Jane:

Your letter is probably one that a million others could write tonight. I commend you for your continued devotion and caring. I sorrow for your psychological and physical burdens. Alzheimer's disease is a cruel and relentless trial. Interestingly, more of an oppression to the caregiver than to the person with the actual disease. I have personally cared for hundreds or maybe thousands of patients with this awful scourge. I have had virtually nothing of value to prescribe or advocate.

Naturally, my antenna has been tuned to any possible breakthrough. One of my close friends, is Dr. Richard Veech, who is the chief of biochemistry at the NIH. He is one of the smartest people I have ever met and probably knows more about the intricate pathways of our body and mind than anybody in the world. At this moment, he has developed a research program that suggests a nutritional supplement comprised of ketone bodies which are the breakdown products of fat metabolism. He and his colleague, Dr. Kieran Clarke from Oxford, have given this material to animals and a few people and have recorded their early results which are very intriguing.

The temptation is to franchise their work to a drug company but this step would lead to all sorts of commercial mischief which would distort the value. In the meanwhile, I talk with Dr. Veech weekly and support him in trying to push this vital next step.

Dear Dr. Bortz: I have thought that the current health care mess has an analogy in the banking mess that occupies all the headlines. We are upset with the financial crisis and are finding hundreds of billions of dollars to bail out the bad actors.



Letters to Dr. Walter Bortz II

But what about the medical care system with a yearly budget of \$2.5 trillion with a comparably poor return on investment?

– Henry Pickens, Akron, Ohio

Dear Henry. You are sitting right on top of an example that I have been personally marinating. I believe your proposition is precisely on target but the public attention has not been drawn to the excesses and poor results of health care which the medical care crisis similarly exhibits. I am currently writing a book called *Next Medicine* which explores this corollary. How can we as a nation justify spending 2.5 trillion, trillion with a "T," dollars per year on a dysfunctional system? Stay tuned.

Dear Dr. Bortz: At each local gathering, I get rumblings about the awful bills that accompany every illness encounter. They range from minor issues like those of ER visit charges to those in excess of \$100,000, none of which make sense. Any comment? – Bill Franklin, Youngstown, Pennsylvania

Dear Bill. I just had my knee scraped to repair a torn meniscus. The bill for four hours in the Surgi-Center was \$11,000. Let's see, that is \$460 per minute. I'm sure that my minor example is multiplied by the tens of thousands. Each of us is astonished and outraged by what are clearly excesses. In my forthcoming book, I cite a quote that says "the medical system today is doing more and more to fewer and fewer at higher and higher cost with less and less benefit." This summary statement says it all and requires a total revision of our medical care system. I am trying to play my role in this upheaval. My dear friend Norman Cousins said, "nobody is smart enough to be a pessimist." As an optimist therefore, I think that we can make it happen." Yes, we can!"

Dr. Walter Bortz II, is one of America's most distinguished scientific experts on aging. He has spent his career at Stanford University where he holds the position of Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine. He has written five books and run 38 marathons. Would you like to send a letter to Dr. Bortz? Email him at DrWBortz@aol.com or visit www.walterbortz.com.