

Dr. Oz and the Politicalization of Health.

Oz Knows How to Doctor the Truth. It's time to stop the wizard.



KEY POINTS:

- Dr. Mehmet Oz is trained as a cardiothoracic surgeon but has spent most of his career as a "television doctor."
- On his television show, Oz often advocates for unproven and unscientific health prescriptions.
- Oz is using the wealth he's accumulated selling misinformation to run for the U.S. Senate.
- Doctors and politicians and politicians who are doctors need to be held accountable for spreading false health information.

I've hated Dr. Oz for years. This article is not just about his run for senate in my home state. Although seeing recent, relevant political signs, advertisements, and social media posts have made me hate Oz more – and I didn't really think that was possible.

I'm not a journalist nor a political commentator; I'm a psychologist. Why does a psychologist hate Oz so much?

I'm a health psychologist who studies body image, eating behaviors, and concerns about weight. I've written over a 100 scholarly journal articles and chapters but am perhaps most proud of the books I've written. In them, I try to make the scientific research about these health issues accessible for nonscientists with concerns about their bodies and weight. And it turns out that is just about [everyone](#).

But not everyone cares about the scientific evidence suggesting that dieting isn't effective in the long-term. Although the positive body image movement has gained traction, most people – even

[children](#) who have yet to start kindergarten -- wish they were thinner, more muscular, taller, or just better looking. It's an uphill battle to convince people to work on their psychological health and self-acceptance as opposed to lowering the number on the scale. Even my own mother claims to read my books and then starts a new diet on Monday (against my advice).

Enter Dr. Oz. Throughout his career, Oz has claimed to want to help people live healthier, happier lives in smaller bodies. In some ways, this makes us not entirely different (minus that last part). Of course, his pedigree as a Harvard and University of Pennsylvania-trained cardiologist outpaces what I even could hope to achieve as a University of California-trained Ph.D. Never mind that he has literally saved lives.

Oprah introduced Oz to the wider world, first on her show and then by producing the Dr. Oz Show, which debuted in 2009 and only wrapped its last episode this year. Oz's charisma helped to make him a superstar, but it doesn't hurt that he offered cures to all that ails us. Do you weigh more than you'd like? Are you tired? Are you getting older? Would you like to speak to a deceased relative?

How can a cardiothoracic surgeon help you to lose weight and talk to your late grandma? Herein lies my disdain for Dr. Oz. His education and early accomplishments suggest that he is an intelligent man. However, he has used his talents to prey on the insecurity and fears of people who often don't have access to information, education, an attentive physician – or any medical care at all. He should know better.



Oz has been called out for his pseudoscientific stunts. An article published in the British Medical Journal in 2014 evaluated 40 episodes from his television show and found that 54% of the claims made in these episodes were either not supported by research or were actually contradicted by research. During the pandemic he supported the use of hydroxychloroquine, an antimalarial drug, to treat Covid-19 even though the FDA ceased to support its use. Still, he became an informal advisor to President Trump as the pandemic led to not just millions of deaths but widespread anxiety and the politicization of public health policies.

Supplements, powders, diets, magical superfoods and the people who peddle them all offer a mirage of control over one's health and well-being. I appreciate why Oz's oversimplified prescriptions for life are compelling. But it's important to see behind the curtain; Oz has preyed

upon vulnerable people's health concerns and become incredibly rich as a result. How could we be sure he wouldn't do the same thing in office? Related, if you can't trust a man to provide accurate information in a field (health) in which he is trained by some of the best universities in the world, how can we trust him to make policy decisions that will affect our children's school curriculums, gun control, civil rights, or military spending?

The NY Times recently published an article titled "[Pennsylvania Stakes its Claim as Center of the Political Universe](#)" so it seems that writing off Oz as potentially just *one* inconsequential senator from Pennsylvania severely underestimates the reach he could have. I desperately hope to move past a [post-truth](#) world and implore Pennsylvanians – and voters everywhere – to expect leaders to rely on science and data when making policy decisions. Oz could've continued to save lives by never leaving a hospital. As a television star he has likely cost lives. It's time to limit the damage he can do.