

LETTER

The 'last word'

Eyal Shahar, MD, MPH

Professor, Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA

Correspondence address

Dr. Eyal Shahar, Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, The University of Arizona, 1295 N. Martin Avenue, Tucson, AZ 85724, USA. E-mail: shahar@email.arizona.edu

Accepted for Publication: 6 December 2011

To the Editor

You kindly asked me if I wished to have the 'last word' and respond to Penston's letter [1] and Miller's letter [2] on my book review [3]. I debated for a day, for the reasons below and eventually decided to offer a short response.

A scholarly exchange is a debate between arguments. And when no new arguments are available, the exchange often turns into personal and rhetorical attacks [1,2]. That's the time to end it. How should I respond to someone who tries to ridicule me by asking me (in the third-person) rhetorical questions about statements he calls *unqualified* knowledge [1]? How should I respond to someone who describes my arguments as "inspired playful academic provocation" and "dramatic views of impossible validity" [2]? Is either even worth a reply?

I could have shown that every mocking (and non-mocking) example of Penston [1] is no more than conjectural knowledge (if stated precisely) or is simply irrelevant (what's wrong with basing a decision on uncertain knowledge?). But the reader would have learned nothing new. Indeed, I did not find any new argument in these letters. Not surprisingly, Penston and Miller haven't changed their minds and I doubt that my recent letter [4] has made a difference. Now it is up to the readers to issue a verdict. As they deliberate, perhaps they can also decide whether "nothing can exceed the speed of light in vacuum" is still classified as *unqualified* knowledge [5]. A year ago I think it was—in many minds that kept their feet firmly on the ground.

References

- [1] Penston, J. (2011). Keeping our feet firmly on the ground: a reply to Eyal Shahar. *International Journal of Person Centered Medicine* 1 (4), 839-840.
- [2] Miller, C.G. (2011). An unattractive hypothesis – RCTs' descent to non-science. *International Journal of Person Centered Medicine* 1 (4), 841-842.
- [3] Shahar, E. (2011). Research and medicine: human conjectures at every turn. *International Journal of Person Centered Medicine* 1 (2), 250-253.
- [4] Shahar, E. (2011). On science, statistics and mental states. *International Journal of Person Centered Medicine* 1 (3), 635-636.
- [5] <http://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1109/1109.4897.pdf>