

To judge from his public relations profile, Professor Sir Harry Howell, MD, VP, DSc, FA Hom, FF Hom, ND, PhD, PhD, DAc, MSc, BSc, FBATM, is one of the most distinguished figures on Britain's "alternative" medicine scene. The President of the Howell Institute of Nutrition and the Howell College of Health Sciences, he was given top billing in September by *Good Housekeeping* magazine as one of Britain's "Top Nutritional Therapists". Adverts for his institute's courses in nutrition are currently filling large spaces in leading health magazines, claiming to provide "the most comprehensive courses in nutritional medicine available anywhere in the world".

His medical practice at Harley House, London, next to the Royal Academy of Music and just off Harley Street, seldom seems quiet. His current specialism is "The Pain Clinic" in which he offers "a vast range of treatments that helps to deal with almost every kind of pain". Dying cancer patients and the chronically ill come to his door, and are asked to pay handsomely for his remedies.

In an article published by *Big Issue* magazine last month, Professor Howell railed against the inadequacies, as he saw it, of conventional medicine in dealing with chronic fatigue. He urged readers to go instead to members of the International Federation of Clinical Nutritionists, of which he is president. At meetings of his institute in December, held at the Charing Cross and Westminster medical school, admiring students and practitioners filled a lecture theatre and solicited others to join the federation.

In two weeks' time, Howell is due to go on the road, promoting sales for Nutri (Imports and Exports) Ltd, one of Britain's larger health food manufacturers. Howell has claimed that Nutri's latest medical remedies, which he personally "researched and formulated", can effectively treat fungal and parasitic infections. His cures for these problems are "Candaway" and "Paraway"—a mixture of walnut leaves, garlic, fennel and wormwood. Paraway is, he says, based on his wide experience of "colonic irrigation"—washing out patients' rectums as a purported medical treatment. Howell says that "having given over 15,000 colonic irrigations" he has found that "very few of my patients have not had worm infestation".

Howell has been holding seminars like these for years, without apparently arousing suspicion. In March 1993, he told an audience attending a weekend seminar on cancer at the Royal Masonic Hospital that his medical practice in the area of terminal illness had begun in the 1980s after he had cured a cat of testicular cancer. After a period during which he says he "illegally" treated animals, he moved on to "my first human". This human was, he says, a woman living in Windsor Castle (not *that* woman) who was suffering from "brain stem cancer". Howell says he cured her using a "Field Pulse Meter", an electronic gadget, which he showed his audience, and which allegedly detected that the cause of the cancer was a pencil-thin beam of radio waves emanating from a nearby Nato base. The cure was to move her sleeping place to an area of less "geopathic stress". An undercover TV researcher who monitored this lecture was not aware of any other mem-

Duncan Campbell looks at the man who claims that shark cartilage can heal both cancer and Aids, and finds that whoever benefits from the cure, it isn't the patients

A case of shark practice

ber of Howell's audience becoming credulous on hearing this account.

In May 1993, Howell was back at the Royal Masonic Hospital to hold a further seminar on "Aids and the Immune System" in which he suggested that Aids could be "treated and prevented" with a "nutritional and herbal protocol". This time his sponsors were "Enzyme Process (UK) Ltd", a remedy company whose "Shark Cartilage Liquecence" he has recommended as a cure for cancer. More recently, Professor Howell has been touting Nutri's "Car-T-Cell" shark cartilage extract as the new "cure" for cancer.

When visiting his Harley House "Alternative Medicine Clinic", patients are handed profiles that describe Howell as a Professor at the Open University, as the Senior Visiting Professor of Lymphology at the Open International University, as a Doctor of Medicine, Bachelor of Science, Master of Science, Doctor of Science, Doctor of Philosophy (twice), and as the Senior Consultant to Colombo South Hospital, Sri Lanka.

His is a remarkable list of qualifications. But many of the institutions he claims have awarded him honours are hard to find. None but Howell himself, for example, appears to have heard of the "Harley University of London". Those that do exist, such as the Open University and the Colombo South Hospital (Sri Lanka) say they have never heard of Sir Harry. Nor has Buckingham Palace. Although his personal notepaper bears a crest and the title "Sir Harry Howell", details of his knighthood cannot be located.

Next Tuesday on Channel 4, Sir Harry's mission to mislead patients may be seen to start unravelling (*Undercover Britain*, Tuesday 8 February, 9pm). Watched through the lenses of hidden cameras, it is difficult and chilling to believe that a clinical manner more familiar on a secondhand car lot has passed muster as medicine for more than a decade.

Before Christmas, Howell was consulted by a person with Aids. Mark, who has Aids, and his partner Andy, who is HIV-positive, were both equipped with hidden cameras. They knew Howell had already spoken widely of "over 3,000 recorded and documented cases of full-blown Aids that have been completely cured"—a claim he was to repeat to them. They wanted to know just what this cure might be.

In the consultation, Howell wasted no time in launching into his sales pitch. "Well, it can be that you're very lucky," he told Mark. "We've just got something from America, just starting to come through this

week. And I'm the only person in this country using it." The "something" turned out to be shark's cartilage extract. "It offers the best hope that I've seen," said Harry Howell.

For someone facing life-threatening illness, the news could hardly have been better. Shark extract, said Howell, contains "five chemicals which kill cancer cells . . . it prevents cancer cells from spreading. So whatever the situation is, with cancer, it arrests it at that point." Howell added: "I've got two patients who've been given a week to live. In their case, I'm using one [ampoule of shark extract] a day. Already we're getting success—a guy who was given until the end of this coming week. Already they're saying that he's starting to eat. He's starting to pull out, he's getting stronger, that's within a week. I've got him on this every day."

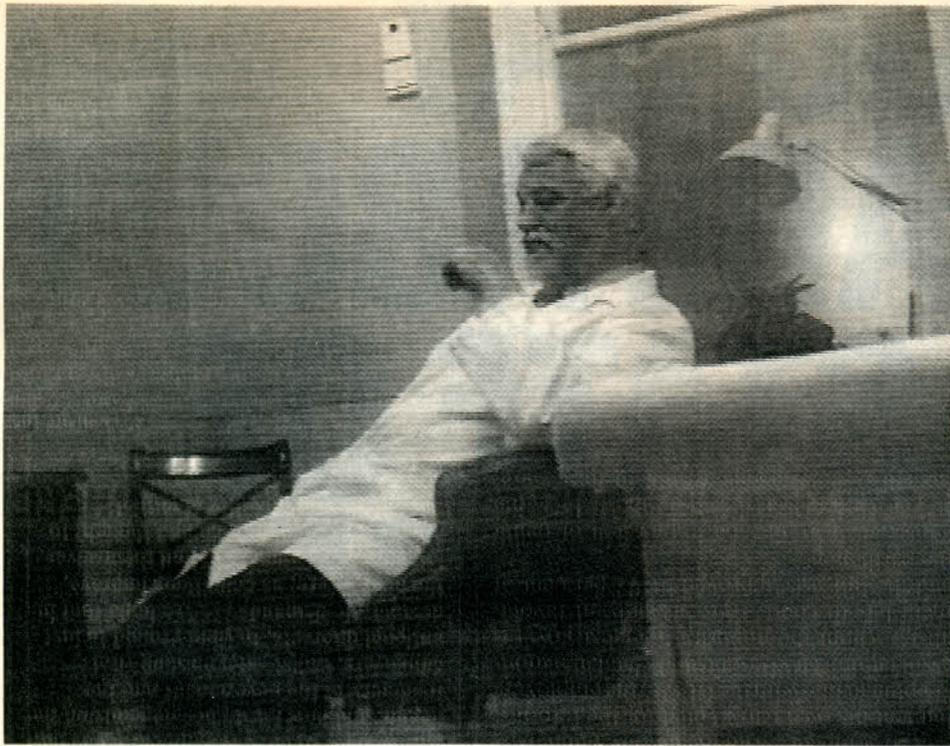
For Mark, who had recently been diagnosed as having Kaposi's sarcoma (KS), a cancer common in people with Aids, there was more news to come. "I've seen all the data, particularly with KS, and they've got a 98 per cent cure on Aids."

There was, however, a "snag". It's not cheap. The shark's cartilage is £280. You take one capsule per week. So in reality, that only works out at £10 a week." But shark extract on its own would not be enough, he explained, so "to reverse [the cancer] and to actually break up the cancer cells which are existing, there's another product". This turned out to be "Natcell Bovine Thymus Complex", also sold by Nutri, at a price of £35 for a single ampoule. Howell wanted Mark to buy six ampoules of thymus, and 24 ampoules of "Car-T-Cell" shark extract at £280—making a total bill of £490.

The products had to be ordered direct from Nutri, whose long-established practice is to pay practitioners like Howell a sales commission of one-quarter to one-third. Neither Howell nor Nutri dispute that Howell was due to receive this commission on thymus gland and shark extract sales.

Nutri's managing director, Kenneth Eddie, soon became directly involved. The same day that Mark consulted Howell, he told a friend of Mark's that "the product [shark extract] does work. Our opinion is that it's going to be one of the best products of its kind on the market place." Eddie also said that patients with Aids and KS were doing "extremely well" after taking shark extract.

The £35-an-ampoule thymus extract would boost Mark's almost non-existent immune system, Eddie claimed; "That's exactly what



it's for. By giving this product you can actually see an increase in T-cells fairly quickly . . . You're maybe not going to get it up on one ampoule. But after a period of two to three weeks, by taking an ampoule a week, you should see an increase." (The number of T-cells someone with HIV has is regarded as a critical measure of the extent to which their immune system is still functioning; few medical claims could be expected to be more seductive to someone with Aids.)

Two weeks ago, Eddie claimed in a letter to Channel 4 that: "We have not and do not make any claims that this product treats cancer." On being advised that the phone call he made had been taped and that the person to whom he spoke was a journalist (the present writer), he did not seek to maintain this.

Shark cartilage has become America's latest top-selling "alternative" remedy for cancer. Sales of health store products containing shark's cartilage took off a year ago, after CBS Television's show, *60 Minutes*, transmitted a report about the claims of Dr William Lane, an agricultural biochemist and former Reagan government official. After becoming interested in the subject, Lane founded Cartilage Consultants, Inc, a New Jersey corporation.

Late in 1992, he published the book which began the shark extract boom in America, *Sharks Don't Get Cancer*. It is subtitled "How shark cartilage could save your life".

Lane's theory is that since sharks don't get cancer (although he admits they do, but not very often) and since they also (together with rays and skates) have a skeleton that is made of cartilage, not bone, there must therefore be a miracle ingredient in shark's cartilage that will stop human cancers progressing. In 1991, he obtained a patent for the use of shark cartilage powder in treating tumours and arthritis. Meanwhile in Costa Rica, an acquaintance of Lane's established *Tecnologica del Tiburon* (Shark Technology), a fast-growing export business manufacturing

shark cartilage powder.

On the 1993 CBS show, Lane claimed that experiments in a Cuban military hospital had demonstrated the efficacy of his powder in curing cancer. He said he had administered shark cartilage powder to cancer patients either orally or rectally. He claimed that three of 15 patients had shown a response to his treatment. But US National Cancer Institute scientists found his data "incomplete and unimpressive". No scientific papers have been published suggesting that shark cartilage has any value for treating cancer.

Despite this, the shark cartilage boom is starting to hit Britain. The first manufacturer with a shark extract product, Solgar Vitamins Ltd, is currently retailing 7oz tubs of "Cartilade" powder for £87.55. A pack of 45 "100 per cent pure shark" capsules is more economical at £18.37.

British shark expert, Dr Keith Banister, a marine biologist and professor at the University of Kent, is very sceptical. The really unique feature about sharks, skates and rays, he says, is not that their skeletons are made of cartilage, but that their bloodstream contains levels of urea so high, the blood would be toxic to any other species. Sharks also have a uniquely unspecific and constantly activated immune system, of great interest to immunologists. Neither of these factors is related to the fact that their skeletons are made of cartilage.

To examine the theory further, Channel 4 supplied Banister with samples of Nutri's shark cartilage extract. He couldn't find any shark cartilage in it, but did find "just a few very small ill-defined particles of no particular shape. They look like bits of handkerchief . . . little fibres of some descriptions." There was "no sign anywhere of any cellular structure that would be detectable as cartilage".

Banister also pointed out that, even for those who wish to believe sharks contain the miracle cure to cancer, there is no point at all in paying a small fortune to health pill manufacturers for products like "Cartilade". Genuine,

Harry Howell: he claims that shark cartilage—an American "alternative" remedy now hitting the UK—offers a miracle cure for Aids and cancer patients

fresh, natural shark cartilage is on sale in every high street as "rock salmon", said Banister: "Rock salmon is dogfish and dogfish are just small sharks. So eat the flesh for your supper and then suck the backbone. That is just cartilage. Chew it if you want to, you're bound to get the same stuff out of it."

Asked to explain the apparent absence of shark cartilage from Nutri's "Car-T-Cell" ampoules of shark cartilage extract, Kenneth Eddie sent Channel 4 a one-page report from a Canadian laboratory purporting to show that the product contained "protein". But the report had been tampered with to remove the details of the material supplied, the laboratory's conclusions, and even the address and telephone number of the laboratory itself.

Wider investigations of Harry Howell's activities have uncovered questionable financial, as well as medical conduct. Three years ago, Howell ran deeply into debt. He was unable to pay £47,344 he owed to American Express Gold Card, eight other credit card companies and five banks among others. After failing to repay his creditors, on 21 May 1993 he was made bankrupt, and his affairs were put in the hands of the Exeter Official Receiver.

He was soon back in business. The "Howell Institute of Nutrition" had already been set up on 26 March 1993, as Richdales Holistic Companies Ltd. Its business is running "Howell Institute of Nutrition" courses, of which Howell is obviously the principal. According to the DTI, it is a criminal offence to be concerned directly or indirectly in promoting, forming or managing a company without official permission, whether formally appointed a director or not.

Patients and others who have dealt with Howell since he was made bankrupt have been asked to make their cheques payable not to him but to Marcia E Howell, his wife. If, as a result, he has received earnings that were more than he needed for normal living expenses and which he has not declared to the Official Receiver, this could be an offence. In November, Howell flew to spend a week in Sri Lanka.

It is a criminal offence under the Medical Act 1983 wilfully and falsely to pretend to be a doctor of medicine. Howell claims in the "Practitioner Profile" leaflet he sent to patients that he is a doctor of medicine. If such a pretence is used for the purposes of financial gain, this could be fraud. Howell charges £80 a session.

The sort of "alternative medicine" practised by Harry Howell is often promoted as struggling to survive in the face of the big medicine of drug companies and medical institutions. But people like Howell and the companies that pay them are part of an industry now worth hundreds of millions of pounds every year. "Practitioners" like Howell, together with some of the companies involved, display a grasp of medical ethics that makes the worst of the big drug companies look lily-white. His unmasking is a frightening indictment of the lack of controls available in the UK to prevent medical and pseudo-medical malpractice.