

Most of us, if not all of us, have put faith in a product that we believe works great only to have others tell us that the product doesn't work at all. Beauty products are probably the worst at this, shampoos that claim to bring out the color in your hair, creams that combat cellulite, strips that combat skin blemishes, etc.

But it's not just beauty products. History is rife with miracle cures and remedies who have been debunked. From Snake Oil salesmen of the Old West, to cigarette ads starring doctors that said smoking is good for you, lots of claims were untrue – even dangerous.

And still out there are Old Wives' Tales that also may be more about belief than results. My mother-in-law believes that putting bacon on a cut removes infection. She also believes putting ashes from the fireplace around your house gets rid of snakes. And that pickling lime cures poison ivy. (On that last one she now believes that some people, including her youngest son, are highly allergic pickling lime. She learned that at the emergency room.)

The apple does not fall far from the tree. My wife treats any upset stomach with hotdog buns. Yes, it has to be hotdog bun. Just a piece of bread or a hamburger bun won't due. I get into trouble when I make a remark like, "Should I put these buns away in the pantry or the medicine cabinet?" or "Jen, shouldn't you have paid for those buns with our health savings account? Is our prescription about to run out on those buns?" She is not amused.

I hesitate bringing up some of these items as I'm sure someone reading this is thinking, "Yeah, but that bacon thing really works!" or "I have had great luck with the cellulite cream!" Science, common sense, and the conventional wisdom may say it doesn't work, but our faith can remain. Still, when a product is sued and loses, or the FDA pulls something from the market, we have to pay attention to that, I think.

For many years colleges across the county have used a product known as COMPASS to help place students in the proper math and English courses. It's a computerized test from the company that also makes the ACT, the main college-readiness exam used throughout the Midwest especially. Students take this COMPASS test and the scores determine what math and English class is best for the student. Are they ready for College Algebra, or do they need a developmental math class before attempting the required college-level course? The COMPASS score tells us that.

The stakes are pretty high with this test. Test poorly and you must take developmental courses that, while helping you get up to speed with things that you probably should have learned in high school, are not required courses. You have to pay for them and spend up to 16 weeks of your time taking these classes but they do NOT count toward a degree. Still, without the developmental classes many students would fail the college-level course over and over again.

However, there are many studies showing that once a student enters the developmental sequence they are much less likely to graduate. Maybe they don't complete because the road to graduating just got longer taking these not-required classes. Maybe it is because they are students who just don't do well in any educational setting which is why they are developmental in the first place. We can't deny the

data that it's much harder to get through college as a developmental student. Correct placement is crucial. Which brings us back to the COMPASS exam.

This year COMPASS exam announced that it is going off the market. It will not be available in 2017. Why? It is not particularly effective in properly placing students in math and English. There is not a strong enough correlation between the COMPASS test result and the student's success in developmental and college-level education.

Wow! This was a product that ACT was making a fortune off of and they pulled from the market because it didn't work like they hoped. This announcement is a big deal for higher education, especially at two-year colleges that relied on COMPASS. It made us question the placement process and developmental education as a whole. Sure there are other tests on the market we could use instead, one is called ACCUPLACER for instance. But one has to ask, if the smart folks at ACT can't create a reliable placement test, are any of their competitors going to do any better?

NCCC along with practically everyone else is looking for a better methodology for placement. We are considering something called Multiple Measures that rely on several pieces of data and not just one high stakes test score. For instance, we may wind up with a system that looks at high school grade point average (GPA) along with a transcript analysis of what courses they took in high school, maybe blended with ACCUPLACER, or other exams. Studies show that high school GPA may be a better indicator than anything else on proper placement and its data we have already. It is my hope that by the end of this academic year we have a new system ready for placement that deemphasizes high stakes testing and replaces it with better, more accurate methodology.

We are also rethinking our developmental classes. Instead of just stand alone semester-length developmental classes, we are using alternatives. For instance, a student who may be borderline between college-level and developmental can take the college-level course but has a required developmental course they take at the same time. This additional course gives the student more time with the instructor and more help on class concepts. We have been doing this for years in class we call "College Algebra Workshop" but are thinking of expanding it to more students.

At the end of the day the most important thing is that we get students in the right classes for them to be successful. According to the Kansas Board of Regents about 38% of students test into one or more developmental classes. That's using the COMPASS test for the most part. Who knows what is going to happen to that number now that COMPASS is gone. And will the replacement be better? Only data will tell. Let's just say our faith in high stakes testing as a product has been shaken. It will be a busy year to get ready with something new, and I hope, improved.

Now I have to go help my mother-in-law put ashes around her house.

If you have any home remedies you would like to share with me or have any questions about this or anything else at the College, please contact me at [binbody@neosho.edu](mailto:binbody@neosho.edu).