



## Controversies in Targeted Therapy: Management of Recurrent Ovarian Cancer

HEW Search beta:

Go

Friday, August 26, 2011

MEETING COVERAGE

NEWS BY SPECIALTY

BLOGS

COLUMNS

WASHINGTON WATCH

STATE REQUIRED CME

MULTIMEDIA

SPECIAL REPORTS

Celebrity Diagnosis | Dr. Rob | Dr. Wes | Gary Schwitzer | Ilifat Husain | InOtherWords | Kevin, M.D. | SHADOWFAX |

### Blogs

Save Print Bookmark Add Your Knowledge Email

the medpage staff blog  
TODAY

## ESP: Extra, or Just Excellent, Sensory Perception?

By: Kristina Fiore | August 08, 2011

A magician made me realize everything I've been missing lately.

No, he wasn't a fortune teller ("Your life will improve vastly if..."), though he could have been. Many of his skills would serve him well in that trade.

His forte was in "mind reading," usually manifested in a card trick. I watched him correctly call at least 20 different cards for diners at a New Jersey restaurant who had been told to pick a card, any card.

Typically, he'd run down the list of numbers and faces out loud – "Ace, king, queen, jack, ten..." – at a pace so fast I thought it was just one of those distractions that kept your focus off the real work involved in the trick. He'd do the same thing with suits, calling out a list backwards and forwards, seemingly arbitrarily.

He was never wrong. I started to suspect that rundown was a bit more deliberate.

When the show was over, he sat down at our table. I wasn't interested in his secrets; everyone knows magicians never give those up. If that list was purposeful, his talent sprang from his ability to read people exceedingly well.

I asked him how he got so good at that.

By watching people on the subway, he said. Or passersby in a park. Seeing what they notice, what they don't. Then trying to figure out how, or why.

When he tried the trick on me (jack of clubs), I couldn't help but wonder if there was more to it than that. He ran down the list of number and face cards. I caught myself diverting my eyes, somewhere between the 10 and the queen, but he could tell instantaneously by the timing of my blink that my card was a Jack.

I couldn't even say what facial gesture (or perhaps it was just a tick) I might have made during the suits run that relayed "clubs," but he caught it on the first pass. (There's a reason I've never played Texas Hold'em, I guess).

In April, I read a piece in the New Yorker about David Eagleman, a neuroscientist who is studying time perception in drummers -- pros like Coldplay's Will Champion. The idea came from a producer who said U2's Larry Mullen once noticed a six-millisecond offset in one of the band's mixes.

Eagleman found that when asked to keep a steady beat, drummers were off by only by 10 milliseconds, while random controls waivered by about 35 milliseconds.

Similarly, one of the most important elements of flamenco is developing an ear for "compas," or rhythm -- and not just to prevent being off the beat by milliseconds. Palmas, or rhythmic hand-clappings, are just as important to the music and dance as other instruments. Flamenco musicians have an eerie ability to clap in between the main pulse of the rhythm (it's called *contratiempo*), something they can fall into and out of mid-song.

Even watching flamenco up close, it is almost impossible to tell which musician or dancer is clapping to the straight beat, and who is clapping in *contratiempo*.

Likely, these flamencos have superior wiring to detect these variations, just like Eagleman's drummers. Couldn't magicians, then, have some neurological advantages in areas of visual perception?

That's probably a question for Eagleman, or for the *Macknik Lab* at the Barrow Neurological Institute in Phoenix, which has focused on understanding, at a neurological level, how magicians manipulate flaws in standard human perception to make their magic happen.

I say it's time to turn the microscopes (or fMRI scanners, in this case) on the magicians themselves.

If they're not wired differently, perhaps those visual perception exercises can do the rest of us some good.

Or not. As I left the restaurant, I told our magician I was glad that not everyone was as perceptive as he was.

Like Be the first of your friends to like this.

2 Comments

August 22, 2011

ESP is often times no more or less than being extra "aware" of certain variables in a given field or area, coupled with well-developed skills, (genetically inherent or otherwise), that seems to the typical person to go beyond what is humanly possible. Pro basketball players' abilities are often a good example of this. That "hoop" is really a quite small thing to be throwing a big ball through with such ease. We have just grown accustomed to seeing it done. It brings the word "gifted" to mind. Some individuals may just be gifted, in relative terms, at reading people.

-- Posted by DrJmg

August 09, 2011

Studies have been done on batters in pro baseball. It seems they don't see the ball all the way to the bat, but predict where the ball will be when it arrives by the pitcher's movements and the position of the ball that they see for a fleeting instant as it leaves the pitcher's hand. Now, I was a pretty lousy hitter in Little League but as an adult I do voice-overs for a living. If you ask me to shave a quarter or half a second off a :60 or :30 read, I'm usually able to do it in no more than two takes. My brain seems to have a built-in clock that allows me to shorten or lengthen a read by a very short amount of time. Not 6 milliseconds like Larry Mullen, but short enough. Now, if I could only be on time for things like dental appointments!

-- Posted by Peter F.

Add Your Comment



### CME Spotlights

Current Quandaries and Advances in Fracture Prediction and Osteoporosis Therapy [more...](#)



HCV Care & Guidance - Using DAA Therapies in Practice [more...](#)



Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus in Practice [more...](#)



Today's Practice, Tomorrow's Potential: Evidence-Based Debates in MS Management [more...](#)



Joint Commission Special Report: Improving Surgical and Inpatient Outcomes in VTE [more...](#)



Living Medical eTextbook: Rheumatoid Arthritis Edition [more...](#)



### Top Blog Posts

- [Steve Jobs Did Not Have 'Pancreatic Cancer'](#)
- [With Love and Laughter, John Ritter](#)
- ['It's Marianne, Right?'](#)
- [Meet Keenan Cahill, the 16-year-old YouTube Sensation](#)
- [Review of the best iPad stylus pens for handwriting and annotations](#)

### MedPage Today Bloggers



#### InOtherWords

The *MedPage Today* staff blog gives our writers a chance to break out of their dispassionate observer role and offer comments and observations on the medical scene they cover as professionals and are part of as patients. It also gives the behind-the-scenes staff -- from editors to production crew to the CEO, all of whom are as involved and committed to medical news as our writers -- a chance to offer their insights. Look for an interesting mix of news and perspective gleaned from the convention floor to the pediatrician's waiting room.

[All blog posts by InOtherWords >](#)



#### Celebrity Diagnosis

Michele Berman and her physician husband, Mark Boguski, co-founded *Celebrity Diagnosis* with a dual mission: to report on common diseases affecting uncommon people and to provide the medical facts behind the headlines. From 1988 to 2000, Dr.

Berman had a pediatric practice in Washington, D.C., where she authored a monthly column for *Washington Parent magazine*. She is also a medical Internet pioneer, having established one of the first medical practice websites in 1997. She and her husband have trained and taught at some of the top medical schools in the country including Harvard, Johns Hopkins, and Washington University in St. Louis.

[All blog posts by Celebrity Diagnosis >](#)



#### Gary Schwitzer

Gary Schwitzer is publisher of *HealthNewsReview.org*, a website dedicated to improving the accuracy, balance, and completeness of medical reporting and helping consumers evaluate the evidence for and against new ideas in health care.

Schwitzer has spent more than 30 years in journalism -- including stints at CNN and MayoClinic.com. He has written about the state of health journalism in such publications as *JAMA*, *BMJ*, *the American Journal of Bioethics*, and *PLoS Medicine*. His blog - which is embedded within *HealthNewsReview.org* - was voted 2009 Best Medical Blog in competition hosted by Medgadget.com. From 2001-2010, he was a tenured professor on the faculty of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Minnesota, teaching health journalism and media ethics. He left that position to devote fulltime to his online publishing work.

[All blog posts by Gary Schwitzer >](#)



#### Kevin, M.D.

Kevin Pho, MD, is a board-certified internal medicine physician based in Nashua, NH. In his blog *Kevin, M.D.*, you will find opinion and commentary on current medical issues by a practicing primary care physician.

"People not involved in healthcare have no idea what goes on 'behind the curtain'. The death of primary care, defensive medicine, malpractice, reimbursement, Big Pharma, and healthcare reform are a small sample of issues that doctors face daily." Kevin, M.D. has been featured or mentioned in *The Wall Street Journal*, *British Medical Journal*, *The Detroit Free Press*, and *American Medical News*. Dr. Pho also was interviewed recently in a segment on defensive medicine on the *CBS Evening News with Katie Couric*.

[All blog posts by Kevin, M.D. >](#)