



Central European
Digital Media
Observatory



Natural News, Misinformation, Nutrition and Durian

Coffee Beans

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For many people, social networks are a primary source of information. Eighty percent of them then use the networks to find health information. This is according to an analysis by NBC News. This is a complex of innovative and powerful news sites that deliver compelling and visually engaging stories about various areas of life, including health [1]. According to this analysis, the topics of cancer, unapproved drugs, and various vaccines accounted for the most health misinformation or misinformation. The analysis also shows that one of the most widely read articles on cancer, which has fuelled widespread debate and a mass of medical conspiracies, is a report claiming that so-called "Big Pharma", the term for paid representatives of large pharmaceutical and biomedical companies, is hiding a cure for cancer.

The article, titled "Industry isn't looking for a cure for cancer; they're too busy making money", was featured on the Natural News website [2] and had over 3 million followers before it was later forcibly withdrawn for "using misleading or inaccurate information" to attract engagement [3]. The Natural News website was created and is still owned by Mike Adams. According to Wikipedia, Natural News is a far-right, anti-vaccine, fake news site known for promoting alternative medicine, pseudoscience, misinformation, and far-right extremism. The site began publishing articles in 2008 and is based in the United States [4]. However, it must be acknowledged that some of the controversies around funding, objectives and efforts to influence decision-making have given rise to conspiracy theories around the pharmaceutical lobby.

But let us return to the Natural News website. The website is designed to promote the sale of dietary supplements, promote alternative medicine and make tendentious nutritional and health claims. For example, on its "Health Ranger Reports" subpage you can read that "People are freaking out about mass toxic food poisoning" or "No, your body doesn't need drugs to be healthy" or even "Big Tech doesn't just censor the truth about freedom and politics; now they censor information about natural health, nutrition, and anti-cancer solutions" [5]. These are just a small sample of headlines from nearly two hundred others, including conspiracy theories about the spread of the Zika virus by genetically modified mosquitoes, which we have written about before.

The Natural News website also recommends durian, which has anti-cancer effects [6]. Durian is a strong-smelling fruit from Southeast Asia, rich in beta carotene, B vitamins, vitamin C, and many other biologically active compounds. Author Roman Tomey writes in a June 24, 2024 article that " ... research has shown that this notorious fruit, which is said to "smell like hell and taste like heaven," can fight the Big C." Hidden under the Big C is the word cancer. The claim is based on a study published in the journal *Nutrients* describing the effect of durian pulp extract on the HL-60 cancer cell line [7]. On another website, a video can be found with ten great health benefits of durian [8]. However, it can also be found mentioning that durian is one of the fruits that can induce shang huo, which according to traditional Chinese philosophy is an imbalance in internal energy that has negative health effects on the body [9]. Other so-called "warming fruits" include lychee, longan, tangerine, mango and the aforementioned durian.

The anti-cancer effect of durian and the beneficial effect on the heart and blood vessels is attributed to flavonoids, which are powerful antioxidants and are secondary plant metabolites, so they are present in a wide range of plant bodies and their fruits. Red wine is also a source of flavonoids. Durian is therefore not exceptional from this point of view. The fact that durian pulp extract reduces the proliferation of cancer cell lines in *in vitro*, i.e. so-called "test tube experiments" [7, 10] does not mean that it will cure cancer in humans. To be able to declare this responsibly is still a very long way off. Moreover, in the "search" for an effect in preclinical studies, it may provide conflicting information that can only be understood by a detailed study of the information in question.

To be able to say responsibly that durian has such and such effects on human health, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled studies must be conducted, i.e. studies where one group of test subjects receives a given preparation, the other a placebo, i.e. an ineffective substance, and no one, neither the test subjects, nor the doctors, nor the evaluators, know who is receiving the test substance and who is receiving the placebo. Therefore, we cannot rely solely on 'off-the-cuff' and often purposefully distorted information on social media. This applies to durian, to various food supplements and, above all, to all medicines and vaccines, for which there must be international participation in the study.

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