

GRE Reading Comprehension

That placebos can cure everything from dandruff to leprosy is well known. They have a long history of use by witch doctors, faith healers, and even modern physicians, all of whom refuse to admit their efficacy. Modern distribution techniques can bring this most potent of medicines to the aid of everyone, not just those lucky enough to receive placebos in a medical testing program.

Every drug tested would prove effective if special steps were not taken to neutralize the placebo effect, so drug tests give half the patients new medication and half a harmless substitute. These tests prove the value of placebos, because approximately five percent of patients taking them are cured, even though the placebos are made from substances carefully selected to be useless. Many feel the lucky patients in a drug test get the experimental drug, because the real drug provides them a chance to be cured. (1) Yet analysis shows that patients getting the placebo may be the lucky ones, because they may be cured without any adverse effects the drug may have. Placebos would cure considerably more patients if the doubts associated with the tests were eliminated. Cures are principally due to the patient's faith, (2) yet since a patient knows the probability of being given a true drug is about fifty percent, the placebo cure rate would be higher by removing these doubts. This suggests that cure rates in the ten percent range could be expected if patients are given placebos under the guise of a proven cure, even when patients know their problems are incurable.

It may take a while to reach the ten percent level of cure, because any newly established program will not have cultivated the word-of-mouth advertising needed to ensure its success. One person saying "I was told that my problem was beyond medical help, but they cured me," can direct countless people to the treatment with the required degree of faith. Furthermore, when only terminal illnesses are treated, those not cured tell no one of the failure.

Unfortunately, placebo treatment centers cannot operate as nonprofit businesses. Public health services know that medicine not paid for by patients is often not taken or not effective because the recipient feels the medicine is worth just what it cost him. Therefore, though it is against higher principles, treatment centers must charge high fees for placebo treatments. This sacrifice, however, is a small price to pay for the greater good of the patients.

1. Which one of the following best expresses the main idea of the passage?
 - (A) Placebo treatment is a proven tool of modern medicine and its expanded use would benefit society's health.
 - (B) Because modern technology allows for distribution of drugs on a massive scale, the proven efficacy of the placebo is no longer limited to a privileged few.
 - (C) The curative power of the placebo is so strong that it should replace proven drugs because the patients receiving the placebo will then be cured without risking any adverse side effects.
 - (D) The price of placebo treatment must be kept artificially high because patients have little faith in inexpensive treatments.

- (E) Semi-placebos—drugs that contain only a small amount of the usual dosage—are even more effective curatives than either the placebo or the full-strength drug.
2. Which one of the following is most analogous to the idea presented in the last paragraph?
- (A) Buying a television at a discount house
 - (B) Making an additional pledge to charity
 - (C) Choosing the most expensive dishwasher in a manufacturer's line
 - (D) Waiting until a book comes out in paperback
 - (E) Contributing one dollar to the Presidential Campaign fund on your tax return
3. According to the passage, when testing a new drug, medical researchers give half of the subjects the test drug and half a placebo because
- (A) proper statistical controls should be observed.
 - (B) this method reduces the risk of maiming too many subjects if the drug should prove to be harmful.
 - (C) all drugs which are tested would prove to be effective otherwise.
 - (D) most drugs would test positively otherwise.
 - (E) the cost of dispensing drugs to all the patients is prohibitive.
4. It can be inferred from the passage that the author might
- (A) believe that the benefits of a placebo treatment program which leads patients to believe they were getting a real drug would outweigh the moral issue of lying.
 - (B) support legislation outlawing the use of placebos.
 - (C) open up a medical clinic that would treat patients exclusively through placebo methods.
 - (D) believe that factors other than faith are responsible for the curative power of the placebo.
 - (E) believe that placebo treatment centers should be tax-exempt because they are nonprofit businesses.
5. Which one of the following best describes the organization of the material presented in the passage?
- (A) A general proposition is stated; then evidence for its support is given.
 - (B) Two types of drug treatment—placebo and non-placebo—are compared and contrasted.
 - (C) A result is stated, its cause is explained, and an application is suggested.
 - (D) A dilemma is presented and a possible solution is offered.
 - (E) A series of examples is presented; then a conclusion is drawn from them.
6. Which one of the following most accurately characterizes the author's attitude toward placebo treatment?
- (A) reserved advocacy
 - (B) feigned objectivity
 - (C) summary dismissal

- (D) perplexed by its effectiveness
- (E) zealous promotion