It’s The “Unknown Unknowns” That Will Get You

Channeling Donald Rumsfeld

August 28, 2025 By Mike Barr

TL;DR: Dr. Sally Weinrich was a PhD nurse with “Alzheimer’s” on both sides of her family who was diagnosed with the disease in her late 60s — and then reversed it. Her case, documented in a remarkable video interview, illustrates what functional medicine practitioner Mike Barr calls the “unknown unknowns” of modern medicine: powerful evidence for lifestyle-based dementia reversal that trillion-dollar industries have no financial interest in sharing with you.

- The core insight: “Corporate capture” of medical knowledge keeps patients from learning what actually works.
- Sally’s key labs: Low vitamin D, low zinc, dangerously low cholesterol (130), undiagnosed mycotoxin/mold exposure, and a knee replacement that was off-gassing plastic.
- What moved the needle most: Commitment to the process, exercise, 8 hours of sleep (up from 6), and twice-daily meditation.
- The result: CNS Vital Signs cognition score went from the 25th percentile to the 86th — over two years.
- The bottom line: This doesn’t require specialized clinics or $30,000 drugs. Sleep. Exercise. Meditation. Clean eating. Targeted nutrition. Anyone can do this.

[IMAGE: Portrait-style or thoughtful image of an older couple — conveying resilience, recovery, partnership]

Channeling Rumsfeld

I suspect I am going to post about my newfound love — Aseem Malhotra — at least one or two more times before I get this all out of my system.

I cannot remember a time when someone so energetic, so articulate, so effortlessly comfortable citing the medical literature, and with so much clinical credibility launched such an intelligent full-

scale attack on the current state of medicine — in the UK, yes, but also in Canada, in the US, and from what I hear from friends abroad, up to and including Germany, Japan, and a handful of countries in between.

CatSalut, I suspect, still stands out as an exception. (Agatha, we miss you. Ditto, Felipe and Jose.) I'm sure there are others. And I'd love to know more about the healthcare systems of India, Brazil, Finland, South Korea, and Taiwan. After writing this — The Netherlands and Australia too. (#1 and #2 in health outcomes, spending nearly half of what the U.S. spends as a percentage of GDP.)

William Davis, perhaps not coincidentally also a reformed cardiologist, is the next closest I can think of. Even if he occasionally over-interprets from his new-found biases. (It's not really the 20th-century cultivar.) Pretty much everyone, at one point or another, will slip up. Everyone will prove to have a blind spot. But back to Rummy.

The "unknown unknowns" — what you don't know you don't know — are what will get you.

This ties into Aseem's conversation with Hyman because of what he so adeptly identified as the real danger and tragedy of modern medicine: what he called the "corporate capture" of medical knowledge.

> You don't know what you don't know — because very powerful entities don't want you to know you don't know it.

This post could go on endlessly scrolling through every diagnosis to which this applies. But this morning I was revisiting a YouTube interview with "Alzheimer's Survivor" Dr. Sally Weinrich — so I decided to use her as the example.

It could just as easily apply to a bipolar or depression diagnosis. To HAND. To nearly all psychiatric and neurological complaints. Even to most cardiometabolic and endocrine disorders.

Meet Sally Weinrich, "Alzheimer's Survivor"

I put "Alzheimer's Survivor" in quotation marks not because I doubt her diagnosis, but because that is how both the interviewer, Nadu Tuzkli, and Sally herself describe her. I also put it in quotation marks because I have growing doubts about whether Alzheimer's is really any distinct condition. (Feel free to inquire about my book project.)

Sally is a PhD nurse who spent a significant portion of her professional life conducting prostate cancer research. Her husband Martin is a PhD biostatistician who teaches — or taught. She was 76 at the time of the interview; he was 82.

Sally reports having Alzheimer's on both sides of her family. No details on how those relatives were definitively diagnosed, but senile dementia still gets diagnosed as Alzheimer's often enough after little more than a failed clock-drawing or cube-copying test — or an inability to count

backward from 100 by sevens. The hours-long neuropsychological evaluation that some neurology departments insist on performing is mostly just a billing boondoggle. To be conservative: let's say Sally had a family history of dementia on all sides.

When she began experiencing cognitive issues in her late 60s, she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

Sally initially went the drug route. That's where the MDs send you. But she got worse, not better.

In 2016 she discovered Dr. Dale Bredesen. (Here he is talking with Brian Johnson.)

What the Testing Revealed

In her own telling, of Dr. Bredesen's then "36 holes" in the metaphorical roof, Sally had 35 — every one except a history of Lyme or co-infections. So she got busy with testing.

Her vitamin D was low. Her zinc was low. And — perhaps most surprisingly for someone on no medications — her total cholesterol was just 130. Both women and men her age do best with total cholesterol closer to 200.

Lab Test	Target Range
Total Cholesterol	150–200
Vitamin D	50–80
Zinc (serum)	90–110
Copper:Zinc ratio	0.8–1.2 : 1

Sally had admirably resisted the WHI hysteria and insisted on bioidentical HRT at menopause. Following Dr. Bredesen's published optimal targets, she added testosterone (cream), DHEA, and pregnenolone — the "hormone of memory."

Hormone	Target Range
DHEA Sulfate (serum)	150–500 mcg/dl (men) / 100–380 mcg/dl (women)
Free Testosterone (serum)	6.5–15 pg/ml (men) / 0.02–0.5 pg/ml (women)
Estradiol (E2)* — balanced with P4	<39 pg/ml (men) / 50–100 pg/ml (women 60+) / 100–350 (premenopause)
Progesterone (P4)	<1.4 ng/ml (men) / 1–20 ng/ml (women)
Pregnenolone (P5)	100–250 ng/dl

*Estrone (E1) can be inflammatory and is often elevated in overweight men or men in poor metabolic health. Since excess estrogen has been associated with mental decline in men, it may be wise to check all three main estrogens — estrone, estradiol, and estriol — or at minimum E1 and E2.

The Setbacks — And What Fixed Them

It took 30 days before Sally started noticing positive changes — though Dr. Bredesen

conservatively counsels giving it 90 to 180 days. Some people give up after a month or two even when they report a “great fog lifting.” Like the Sirens, the old ways woo you back.

Sally also had setbacks.

A knee replacement turned out to be off-gassing plastic into her body. She had it removed. (I have seen off-the-chart molybdenum blood levels — apparently resulting in hallucinations — tracked back to knee replacements. While Mo-fueled hallucinations are rare, excess molybdenum and copper can deplete testosterone. Please do your homework on implants — including follow-up blood metal screenings. And anyone with mercury dental amalgams and signs of cognitive decline or chronic fatigue might want to explore whether careful removal helps.)

Sally also turned out to be among the approximately 25% of people who cannot efficiently clear mycotoxins — and she had mold in her home. Addressing that took time.

Once the mycotoxin issue was addressed, her cognition score soared to the 86th percentile — up from the 25th.

She had initially scored in the 25th percentile on the CNS Vital Signs cognitive test (the only diagnostic tool that has ever impressed me, and apparently now accessible from a home computer). Over roughly a year she worked her way to the 61st percentile. Once the mold issue was resolved: 86th percentile. All in all, two years.

The Knock-On Effects — This Is My Favorite Part

And then there were the unexpected cascade benefits. These are the exact opposite of the knock-on effects from prescription medications and surgeries.

I first observed this phenomenon not with acupuncture but with Chinese herbal medicine: you treat the chief complaint and suddenly two or three other long-standing conditions also resolve. It’s not inexplicable — you are restoring foundational health. Little surprise that other complaints improve.

With Sally, once vitamin D and zinc came into range (and note that vitamin D and vitamin A both require zinc-dependent enzymes to function), her depression lifted.

And once she cleaned up her diet — no wheat, no grains — all her joint aches, what most people would call arthritis or osteoarthritis, disappeared. (Is it too late to un-replace that knee??)

Unlike our current “sickcare” system, the side effects of this approach are that other stubborn ailments unexpectedly improve — or vanish entirely.

What Sally Says Made the Biggest Difference

Here's what really blew me away. Near the end of her interview with Nadu, Dr. Weinrich was asked which one or two elements of the Bredesen protocol had the biggest impact. Are you sitting down?

1. The decision to actually do this — the commitment to put in the work, to be patient, and to enlist a partner's participation if possible
2. Adding exercise
3. Allowing more time for sleep (8 hours instead of 6)
4. Twice-daily meditation (10–20 minutes each session)

And yes, getting her vitamin, mineral, and hormone levels into range. Getting the good stuff in. Getting the bad stuff out.

This blew my mind because it is all so doable. No equipment. No infusions. No informed consent forms. Not even any Sudoku or Wordle.

Sleep. Exercise. Meditation. Clean eating. Anyone can do this. This doesn't cost tens of thousands of dollars. No doctor visits. No ICD-10 codes. No newly christened Memory Wings.

And no one dies from a brain bleed caused by a $30,000 drug she never should have been given.

(Still grieving for you, Genevieve. And your daughters. And your Villages friends.)

Why You Don't Know This Is an Option

No one wants you to know that you don't know this is an option. The industries with a financial stake in keeping you medicated are not small.

[IMAGE: Infographic or visual of industry market value table — or a "follow the money" style illustration]

Industry	U.S. Market Value
Hospitals	$1.5T
(Private) Health Insurance	$1.5T
Medical Practices	$1.2T
Pharmaceuticals	$634B
Medical Schools	$210B
Medical Devices	$180B
"CME"	$3.5B

(Healthcare costs account for 17.6% of U.S. GDP — $14,570 per person annually — consuming 27% of the FY2024 federal budget, while producing the worst health outcomes and second-worst administrative efficiency among wealthy countries.)

Martin's Words

Around the 30:15 mark of the interview, Sally's husband Professor Martin Weinrich appears. If I hadn't cried away my entire reserve of tears these past six months over all that is happening in this country and in the world, I would have teared up. Here is his understated, gratitude-streaked take:

“It’s difficult to prove this the way you would prove something with randomized, controlled clinical trials. This is a case report of a single patient. But when that ’patient’ is your wife — when you see it with your own eyes — you know it’s the real thing. You know it actually happened. And it is nothing short of a miracle.”

I would not give this such credence had I not seen or heard this story again and again and again. Not always — this is in no way 100%. But it might be 50%. In their tightly managed studies, it approaches 75%. That is not nothing. And almost everything else improves along the way.

That Dorothy-Scarecrow-Glinda “You’ve always had the power” scene keeps creeping into my consciousness. An incensed Ray Bolger: Why didn’t you tell her? Burke: “Because she wouldn’t have believed me. She had to learn it for herself.”

That’s why we do this. That’s why we won’t give up.

Aseem, is there any hope out of the darkness? Show us the way.

Mike Barr, a longtime POZ Contributing Editor and founding member of the Treatment Action Group (TAG), is a science writer, functional medicine practitioner and herbalist in NYC. Reach out to him here. Or sign up for his curated professional-grade supplement dispensary — 30% off your first order, 25% off all auto-refills — here.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/blog/unknown-unknowns-will-get