ABSTRACT: This paper examines the local popular tradition of unorthodox cancer healers and treatments in the Appalachian South. An in-depth case study of an unorthodox cancer healer is presented which focuses on his recruitment to the role of healer, the origin and method of his cancer treatment, and a profile of his client population. The case study is followed by a discussion of other unorthodox healers of cancer in the region for the purpose of elucidating the distinction between the local and mass popular traditions of unorthodox cancer medicine. There is an historically deep and enduring tradition of unorthodox cancer treatments in the Appalachian South, and no doubt other regions of the U.S. as well, which should be considered for a better understanding of the health care alternatives available and the health seeking behavior of individuals who use them.

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly investigations of unorthodox cancer healers tend to focus on those who purvey therapies that generate the greatest public appeal and thus the greatest potential threat to the public's health and pocketbook, such as the Hoxsey treatment, Koch treatment, Krebiozen, Laetrile, macrobiotic diet, antineoplastons, and psychic surgery, to mention only a few. In an effort to inform health care providers and the general public about cancer quackery and the potentially deleterious consequences of some unorthodox cancer therapies, the American Cancer Society (ACS) issues periodically a list of scientifically unproven unorthodox cancer therapies. In 1993 the list included seventy-nine therapies.1 The range of unorthodox cancer therapies available to the public, however, is far more expansive than the ACS's list suggests if we expand our scope beyond those therapies promoted by unorthodox healers of the mass popular tradition and include those of the local popular tradition as well. It is the local unorthodox healer who often eludes the vigilant eye of the ACS, American Medi-
This paper explores the conceptual and historical dimensions of the local popular tradition of cancer therapy in the Appalachian South through an in-depth analysis of an unorthodox cancer healer who never achieved national notoriety and whose practice for most of his life was unknown to the official medical establishment. It entails the story of Preacher Tom Carter, a Primitive Baptist minister from a small community in southwestern Virginia, who treated people for lesions identified as skin cancers with a tissue fixative technique from the early 1900s to 1963. The paper draws largely on interviews with two of the healer's sons, Ward and Dale Carter, and several people in Scott County, Virginia who knew him and, in some cases, were treated by him. A ledger maintained by Preacher Carter and secondary sources also provided useful information. In conclusion, the case study of Mr. Carter is compared with studies of other local unorthodox healers drawn from the literature to elucidate the local popular tradition of unorthodox cancer treatments in the Appalachian South.

THOMAS RAULEIGH CARTER

Thomas Rauleigh Carter was born 15 April 1875 in Many Sinks, a small community near Hiltons in Scott County, Virginia. Like children of most farming families during his time, he received little formal education, going no further than the third grade. He was, however, a literate man who read avidly throughout his life, particularly in the areas of Bible commentary, history, and domestic medicine. Though he is best known as a Primitive Baptist minister and skin cancer healer, Preacher Carter served Scott County as deputy sheriff, deputy treasurer, and licensed midwife. An imposing man of six feet, six inches weighing over 300 pounds, he was by all accounts a great orator both in the pulpit and on the political stump.

Preacher Carter was referred to by some in Scott County as "Doc Carter," though he never claimed to be a physician. He was given the tag "Doc" because he was well known locally as a midwife, having successfully delivered over 300 babies, a bone setter, sewer of wounds, a source of folk and popular medical advice, and a healer of skin cancers. He had a collection of medical books, including Gunn's Domestic Medicine, or Poor Man's Friend in the Hours of Affliction, Pain and Sickness and R.V. Pierce's The People's Common Sense Medical Adviser; which he studied assiduously and frequently consulted. His knowledge of folk remedies was apparently typical of his time, though family members interviewed recall little about his use