

Whatever happened to? Dr Henry Heimlich

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by [PAUL KENDALL](#)

Up until a few years ago, Henry Heimlich enjoyed an unblemished reputation. The inventor of a simple, effective manoeuvre to save choking victims, he was revered around the world; a man who, according to one author, 'had saved the lives of more human beings than any other person [alive] today'. But then editors at newspapers and medical journals began receiving anonymous letters. Far from being a saint, the letters said, Dr Heimlich was a dangerous maverick who promoted unproven medical procedures and tested them on patients in unethical experiments.

To call into question the reputation of such a celebrated figure was shocking, but even more surprising was the identity of the letter writer, eventually revealed as Dr Heimlich's son, Peter.

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'My father has devoted himself to promoting a whole series of discredited, experimental, dubious medical theories which every medical expert says are either useless, dangerous or crackpot,' Peter said following his unmasking.

In particular Peter highlighted his father's insistence that the Heimlich manoeuvre could be used to save victims of drowning and asthma attacks - not just choking - and a bizarre research project that set out to prove that victims of HIV and Aids could be cured by an injection of malaria. Dr Heimlich, he said, had even been responsible for an experiment in China, during which HIV patients had been subjected to malariatherapy.

Dr Heimlich, now 89, won't say anything about the rift with his son, except that it is a 'family matter', but is bullish about his theories. 'Anyone who is not using [the manoeuvre] for unconscious drowning victims is causing their death,' he said when contacted by The Sunday Telegraph.

And he points out that malariatherapy was first devised to treat a form of syphilis in 1918. Doctors claimed that the malaria helped the body fight the virus by boosting the immune system. But Aids researchers say there is no evidence the therapy helps treat HIV.

'I think my father has an overwhelming need for attention,' Peter says.

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