

## Academic freedom isn't the issue in Mack case

Recent coverage of the Harvard Medical School's inquiry into the research conduct of faculty member Dr. John Mack has been entirely in terms of academic freedom.

Mack is not just a researcher investigating signs that Martians contacted the Mayans 10,000 years ago. He is a medical doctor, a psychiatrist at Harvard Medical School. He has written a book lending credence to highly sexualized alien abduction fantasies and has appeared on talk shows to promote that book.

He is joined in the media by dozens of psychotherapists who claim that it makes no difference whether a patient's fantastic allegations are truth or fiction. Mack claims that it makes no difference whether thousands of disturbed individuals were actually abducted and sexually manipulated by body snatchers from

outer space.

Really? Would a responsible oncologist write and promote a book touting the claims of bogus treatments for desperate, dying cancer patients?

Is psychotherapy truly a branch of medicine in which reality is completely irrelevant to the patient's health?

Harvard is a medical center as well as a scholarly research academy. Like all medical centers, it has an obligation to the well-being of all patients whose treatment is influenced by its conduct of medicine.

Let's hope the school's inquiry is not sidetracked by secondary issues of so-called academic freedom.

MARGARET A. HAGEN

Professor, Department of Psychology  
Boston University