

21st CENTURY SNAKE OIL SALESMEN

Schemes advertising dubious pills, potions, diets and other “treatments” for a wide variety of illnesses common in older people have been promoted by “snake oil” salesmen for centuries.

Nowadays instead of listening to sales pitches for home remedies at the county fair, suffering older adults are bombarded by a multitude of pitches for dubious remedies claiming to relieve the discomfort of assortment of age-related ailments in newspapers, magazines, TV and the internet.

FRAUDULENT HEALTH CARE REMEDIES

Many older adults don't trust standard medical treatments for their illnesses and believe that herbal and natural medicines are safer and more effective. An enormous assortment of unproven “miracle cure” treatments are advertised to manage and possibly “cure” painful symptoms of chronic illnesses quickly and easily. Such “miracle cures” include:

- Pacific Ocean Shark Cartilage to treat cancer
- Weight loss programs that don't use diet or exercise
- Unproven diet supplements, herbs, vitamins, minerals
- Programs that reverse diabetes “naturally” using “green juice fasting and live food nutrition” and other “natural” treatments
- A 30-second eye exercise to boost memory
- Managing gout by eating cherries

HAZARDS OF MIRACLE CURES

Ads promoting these treatments appear frequently on TV, magazines, newspapers and on alternative health websites. Besides being ineffective, such “cures” are substantially more expensive than standard treatments.

Most of these products are harmless but ineffective. However they may cause serious side effects or interact with prescription medications or other supplements. Your older relative may spend her money on worthless products instead of proven medications prescribed by her doctor. Her health may suffer if she decides to stop using the medicines her physician prescribed.

HEALTH SCAM TIPOFFS

“If it sounds too good to be true, it usually is” was a catchphrase used by the Better Business Bureau to alert the public to dubious business practices. Keep this slogan in mind when you or an older relative are looking for information about treatments for a particular illness.

Other signs that a product may not live up to its advertising to look for include:

- Promises to help you “Lose weight without diet or exercise” or other dubious claims.

- States that the product is a quick effective cure-all for a variety of different illnesses or diseases for which there currently is no effective cure.
- Claims that a product is an ancient remedy with a “secret ingredient” that will produce a “miraculous cure.”
- Assurances of a “no risk money back” guarantee if you are not completely satisfied with the product.
- No reputable scientific studies or clinical trials of the product.
- The elaborate website promoting the product that doesn’t list the company’s name, address, phone number or other identifying information.

PROTECT OLDER ADULTS FROM HEALTH FRAUD

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends that you talk to a doctor, pharmacist or other health care professional if you have concerns about health products that your parent or other relative is using. Contact the FDA at 1-888-463-6332 with questions or concerns.

Report problems with medical or health products to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA): www.fda.gov/medwatch; 1-800-332-1088

Learn more about health fraud at www.fda.gov/healthfraud

21st CENTURY HEALTH CARE

Tremendous advances have been made in recent years in understanding the causes, cures and treatments of some of humankind’s most devastating illnesses. Unfortunately the potential for health care fraud has also increased. By educating yourself about health care options in your state and community, you can locate and understand the information you need to ensure that your family receives the best health care available.[591/1/10]