

Health Fraud Awareness

Health fraud is the deceptive sale or advertising of products that claim to be effective against medical conditions or otherwise beneficial to health but have not been proven to be safe and effective for the intended purpose. In addition to wasting billions of dollars each year, health scams can lead to delay in proper care and treatment and serious and fatal injuries. Health fraud scams can be found everywhere, promising relief from health issues, including weight loss, memory loss, joint pain, cancer, diabetes, and heart disease.

Common Types of Health Fraud

Cancer fraud. Hoxsey Cancer Treatment is an alternative herbal regimen that was touted as a cure for cancer but was banned in the United States in 1960. Unfortunately, the herbal treatment is currently marketed on the internet and in Mexico despite the FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) indicating that there is no scientific evidence that it has any value to treat cancer.



Arthritis fraud. According to the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, consumers spend about \$2 billion annually on unproven arthritis remedies that are not backed by adequate science.

Bogus dietary supplements. The variety of supplements, vitamins and minerals has grown tremendously, but the advantages have yet to be proven. Companies wanting to make claims that the supplements treat and cure diseases must follow the FDA's premarket New Drug Approval process to show that the supplements are safe and effective.

Weight loss fraud. Since 2003, the FDA has worked with national and international partners to take compliance actions against businesses pushing bogus and misleading weight loss schemes. Additionally, it's important to know that some of the marketed weight loss products contain dangerous prescription drug ingredients that are not listed on the label.

Diabetes fraud. The FDA has taken numerous compliance actions against fraudulent diabetes "treatments" promoted with bogus claims. Bogus claims include statements such as: drop your blood sugar 50 points in 30 days; eliminate insulin resistance; prevent the development of type 2 diabetes; and reduce or eliminate the need for diabetes drugs or insulin. These types of bogus claims can be very dangerous for a person with diabetes.

Influenza scams. The FDA and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection have intercepted products claiming to be a generic version of the influenza drug Tamiflu. The products were shown to contain Vitamin C and other substances not shown to be effective in treating and preventing influenza.

How to Spot Health Fraud

One product that does it all. Be suspicious of products that claim to cure a wide range of unrelated diseases, particularly serious diseases such as cancer, diabetes, infections and heart disease.

Personal testimonies. Products that include personal testimonies such as “I took (product name) 5 days ago and I no longer suffer from (disease). Personal testimonies can be difficult to prove and are the weakest form of scientific validity.

Quick fixes. Be wary of products that suggest a quick cure, especially if the disease or condition is serious. Even with proven treatments, few diseases can be cured quickly. Also, be leery of products that use language such as “in a few days” as it can refer to any length of time making it easier for businesses to finagle out of any legal actions that may result.

Products labeled as “natural.” Don’t be fooled by the term “natural” as it is often used in the health industry as an attention grabber. It suggests that a product is safer than conventional treatments. In fact, some natural products such as poisonous mushrooms can kill when ingested. Also, any product that is potent enough to work like a drug is going to also cause some type of side effect.

Time tested or new found treatment. Products that claim to be a “breakthrough treatment, innovational, miracle cure, exclusive product, new discovery, an ancient remedy, or magical” are highly suspect. If a product was a cure for a serious disease, it would be widely reported in the media and regularly prescribed by a health professional.

Offers satisfaction guaranteed. While claims of money back guarantees sound risk free, it really is risky as marketers of fraudulent products rarely stay in the same place for long and make it impossible for money to be returned.

Promises of easy weight loss. Fraudulent products include statements like “rapid weight loss without dieting.” For most people, the only way to lose weight is to eat fewer high calorie foods and increase activity.

Meaningless medical jargon. Terms and scientific explanations such as “hunger stimulation point, thermogenesis converting stored fats into soluble lipids may sound impressive and may even have an element of truth, but the general public has no way of discerning fact from fiction. Terms can be lifted from a study published in a reputable scientific journal, even though the study was on another subject altogether.

Reporting Health Fraud

If you think a person or company is fraudulently selling human drugs, animal drugs, medical devices, biological products, foods, dietary supplements or cosmetics, they can be reported to the FDA at 1-888-463-6332 or at <https://www.fda.gov/Safety/ReportaProblem/ConsumerComplaintCoordinators/default.htm>.

<https://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm235995.htm>

<https://medlineplus.gov/healthfraud.html>