



## Have You Heard?

By Doris Thomas  
Lancaster Extension  
Home Economist

### ELDERLY AND HEALTH FRAUD

Elderly Americans are swindled out of more than \$10 billion by health charlatans every year. Why does this happen? Because the incidence of disease increases as people grow older. Promoters of unproven health products have found a lucrative market in the expanding elderly population. They capitalize on senior citizen's desires to prevent or cure diseases, to relieve pain and to live a longer life. Health quacks attempt to offer their potential customers "cure-all" remedies for both real and imaginary diseases. In selling these remedies, they may misrepresent data on scientific theories of aging.

They also may promote misconceptions about nutrition and the quality of the nations' food supply. Sometimes they may even try to exploit the religious beliefs of their customers, for example, those whose religion forbids surgery.

Examples of unproven remedies include anti-aging products, arthritis "treatments" such as chelation therapy; and cancer "cures" such as Laetrile, herbal teas, coffee enemas, and severely restricted diets. The people who buy these remedies risk far more than their money because using these products can have serious medical consequences.

Some senior citizens who buy these products believe that they

really work, so the supposed benefits of certain products may be due to placebo effects or relief of psychosomatic symptoms. Other elderly consumers are embarrassed or refuse to admit that they have been deceived. Since many people fail to report promotion of questionable health products, sales of these products often continue unhindered for a long time.

Unfortunately, state and federal regulatory agencies and the medical community often do very little to discourage promoters of questionable health products. Many people think that health fraud is not receiving the attention it should.

How can people protect themselves and learn to distinguish between reputable health professionals and health quacks? According to some of the experts, consumers of all ages should beware of people who do the following:

1. Display credentials or degrees unfamiliar to reputable scientists or educators.
2. Promise quick, dramatic miraculous cures.
3. Claim that: Most Americans are poorly nourished; Sugar is a deadly poison; Most disease is the result of a faulty diet, and can be treated by nutritional methods; Under stress, a person has a greater

need for nutrients; "Natural vitamins" are better than synthetic ones; Doctors cannot be trusted.

4. Use anecdotes and testimonials to support their claims.

5. Use disclaimers or "pseudomedical" words or phrases.

6. Recommend a wide variety of substances similar to those found in the human body.

7. Recommend that everyone take vitamins or health foods, or

both.

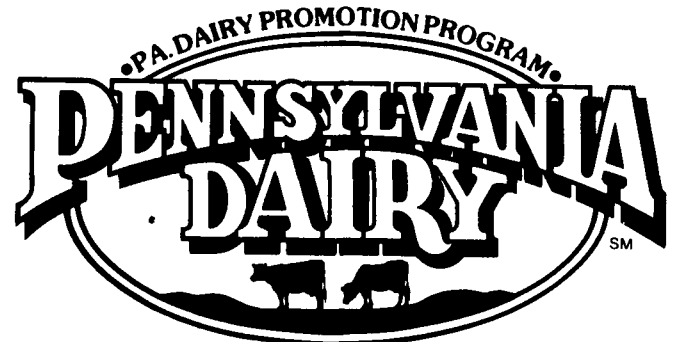
Recently the American Council on Science and Health published a 10-page report titled "Quackery and the Elderly". This report offers advice on recognizing and avoiding fraudulent health products and the misleading tactics used to promote them.

To order a copy of this report, send \$3 to ACHS, 1995 Broadway, 16th Floor, New York, New York 10023-5860.

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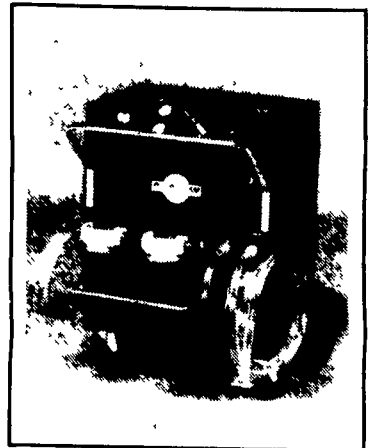
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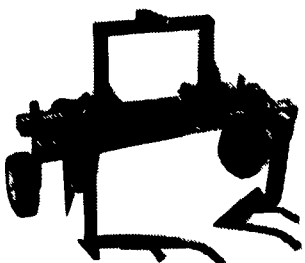
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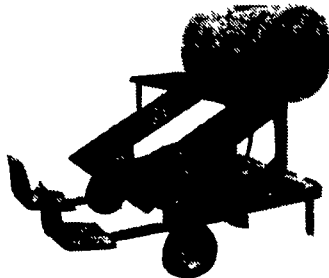
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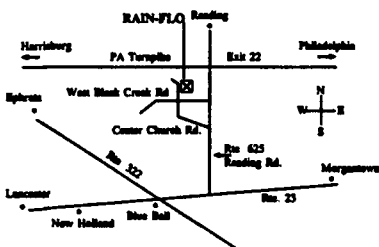
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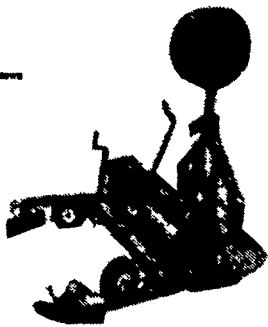
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