

Op-Ed

Preying on the Desperate, Part 3 ***The Broken Promise: A Quick and Easy Cure***

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In December, Part 1, *Miracle Cures Hold False Promise*¹, revealed the ten warning signs of a potential medical scam and provided an illustration of a popular treatment for which cure claims have been made and later rescinded. Last month, we examined testimonials as theoretical evidence of a cure in Part 2, *The Trouble with Testimonials*².

A product has more credibility when unsubstantiated cure claims are avoided. This is not to say that either alternative or conventional treatment modalities are a waste of time. Nor is it to say that science should be solely trusted either. Sham treatments may be found in both conventional and alternative medicine and are especially targeted towards those who may be disillusioned by the shortcomings and corruption often found in medical science.

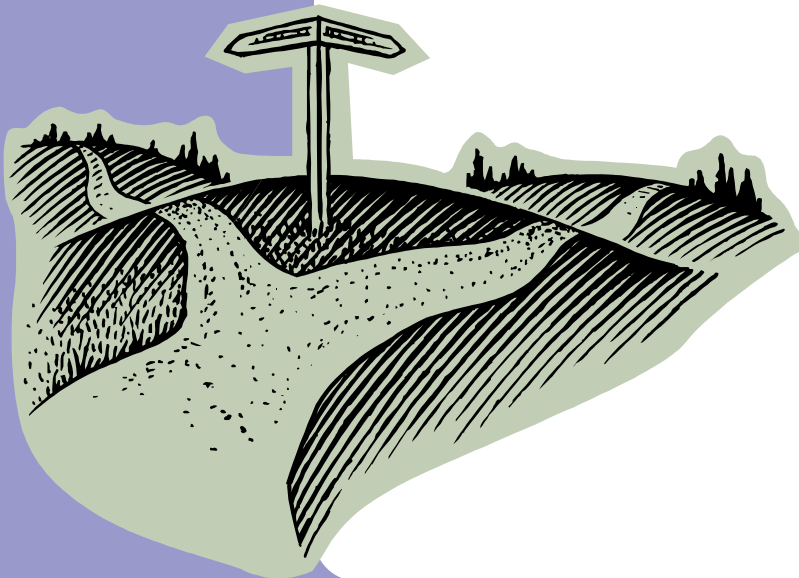
This month we will look at how selling hope through the promise of a quick and easy cure may be used to entice people with chronic illnesses to buy into a misrepresented cure claim.

Selling Hope

Whether it's a juice, food, vitamin product, relaxation, meditation, or a brain exercise, it is enticing to think that a cure may be in easy reach. People who promote misrepresented cures sell hope through positive feelings and a winning personality. They count on the placebo effect and the natural improvement of many conditions over time to validate unproven treatments. Some treatments

may be helpful for managing a chronic illness. Others are simply feel-good strategies that benefit overall health. The real issue is purporting anything unproven as a guaranteed cure for a specific condition.

The advent of the Internet has provided additional means for targeting buyers, particularly in discussion groups where one or more people tout being cured by an unproven treatment and defend their position when others express different views. These people are often the actual sellers of the treatment in question, or individuals with financial interest.



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Frequently, the words they will use to defend their product against those who hold other opinions are dismissive and include phrases such as “unfounded”, “off base”, “uninformed”, “didn’t bother to check it out first”, and “don’t know what they are talking about”. These words are commonly used in an attempt to discredit the opposition and hide the truth when factual data is not available to support a treatment. They are a warning sign of a potential fraud, though they may be used erroneously by the well-meaning as well.

These dismissive phrases are logical fallacies, a mere way to cast doubt and attempt to gather support. This tactic is especially targeted towards stirring the emotions in potential buyers who may be disillusioned and hopeful.

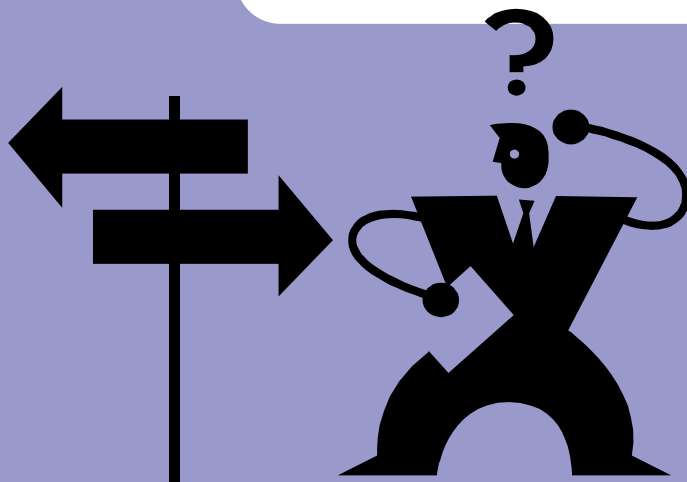
The Quick and Easy Cure

“You can be cured of chronic fatigue syndrome or multiple chemical sensitivity if you just drink this juice, eat this food, or do one of these easy exercises for a few minutes a day.”

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.³ If a cure was really that quick and easy, it would be a well-known public treatment with full details published widely by alternative medicine specialists, assuming it’s not a conventional medicine pharmaceutical. There would also be many sellers cashing in on it. Secret treatments sold and supported only by one or two sellers may be a clue that something unscrupulous is going on, intended or not.

Deciding

A good question to ask is whether any independent doctor, conventional or alternative medicine, supports the treatment as a cure. It’s easy to understand why conventional doctors may not support a treatment if it’s not pharmaceutically based, but does your naturopath or chiropractor believe it is a cure? By very definition, naturopaths and chiropractors seek out natural and alternative treatments. Their opinion is something worthwhile considering.



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An interesting point about schemes is that you decide on whether to participate.² The point of this article is to help you to identify potential schemes so that if you choose to buy in, you are doing so with full awareness of the risks and nature of the product or treatment.

For some, money is available for ready disposal and hope dictates that the cost is worth the risk. For others, risking the loss of the same sum of money when a cure is not guaranteed is not even an option. Ask yourself if you are prepared to accept a loss and if that risk is acceptable to you.

People are only duped if they allow themselves to be misled. The bottom line is that unsubstantiated and unproven cure claims should never be made. Marketing for products and treatments should accurately reflect what a consumer can expect. This is not to say that proof will not become evident in the future. It could go either way, which is where decision making comes in.

References

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