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**Feature Article**

**Being a Prudent Consumer**

Everyone wishes for a good health and wellbeing.

However, some of us are too occupied with our fast-moving lifestyle in today's high-tech marketplace that we tend to look for some form of miracle to make a difference.

And, some of us fall for products with claims like 'miracle health tonic or pill', 'miracle cure,' 'revolutionary scientific breakthrough,' or 'alternative to drugs or surgery'.

With internet revolution, more consumers are exposed to products with such mind-blowing claims where some prey on people's desires for easy solutions to difficult health problems. It ranges from losing weight to curing serious diseases like cancer.

Scammers promote their products through TV commercials and cyberspace. You can find health fraud scams on countless websites, in popup ads and spam, and on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. Some of these products with unsubstantiated claims are also available in our local markets.

Fraudulent products often make claims related to weight loss, memory loss, sexual performance and serious diseases such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, arthritis and Alzheimers.

Unfortunately, some consumers fall for these products without realising that there is nothing such as 'truly amazing' or 'works in minutes' miracles.

Success stories, such as, "It cured my diabetes" or "My tumors are gone," are easy to make up and are not a substitute for scientific evidence.

As soon as you hear or read claims such as "new discovery," "scientific breakthrough" or "secret ingredient," one must raise alarm.

Such health products are a sham as they are deceptively promoted as being effective against a disease or health condition. However, they have not been scientifically proven safe and effective for that purpose.

Consumers, therefore, are advised to be mindful that such products will not just cost them their money but could pose serious health risks.

These products may contain hidden drug ingredients that can be harmful when unknowingly taken by consumers. These products can also lead to dangerous side effects or allergies, causing discomfort.

Also, using such unproven treatments can delay getting a potentially life-saving diagnosis and medication that actually works.

Consumers ought to understand that ‘one product’ cannot do it all by claiming to cure a wide range of diseases. This may include kidney dysfunction, depression, osteoarthritis, dysuria, and lung, cervical and prostate cancer.

Just beware of phrases such as, “Lose 35 pounds in 30 days” or “eliminates skin cancer in days.”.

Don’t be moved when you read “All Natural” as a stated ingredient in the miracle-product. This may contain hidden and dangerously high drug ingredients or even untested active artificial ingredients.

These statements are used to distract consumers from the obvious, common-sense questions about the so-called miracle cure.

One can be easily convinced as the raw ingredients listed, which are more often than not ordinary items that any average person can find and throw together, but claim that their *unique processing combines* these items in such a manner that they produce remarkable health and disease management benefits.

Even with these tips, fraudulent health products are not always easy to spot. If you are tempted to spend on an unproven product or one with questionable claims, the best practice for the consumers is to check with their doctor.

Above all, one has to be prudent and analytical by asking questions and researching on the products before spending any money on them.

A smart question would be, if, indeed, a product has cure for serious diseases such as cancer or diabetes, don’t you think, it would have been vigorously publicised in both social media and mainstream media platforms. Would it be hidden or buried in website pages or on TV infomercials?

Are there any published clinical trials or peer reviewed studies to substantiate the product claims? A smart consumer would look for this before buying the product.

So next time, watch out for those *dietary supplements* which claim an overnight weight loss!

**Consumers need to heed the following Tips prior to purchasing products via advertisements on website pages or on TV infomercials:**

- The treatment claims to be effective against a wide range of ailments;

- The miracle cure is suggested after a condition is diagnosed using a questionnaire (often on the internet);
- The product relies on certain ingredient that is claimed to have mystical properties;
- There is hardly any scientific evidence to substantiate the claim that the miracle cure actually works.