



## Minister for Health

### Crackdown on Wonder Drugs/Miracle Cures

October 31, 2002

The NSW Government will crackdown on 'miracle cures', 'wonder drugs' and misleading health claims and advertisements to protect people who are sick and vulnerable.

The Minister for Health, Mr Craig Knowles, today said that up to \$2 billion is spent in Australia on alternative health products and procedures, many of which have not been scientifically tested or proved.

"There are people who are preying on the sick and most vulnerable in society by offering cures that have no medical benefit to the patient," said Mr Knowles.

"Using these miracle cures can have tragic consequences. The parents of a child with a serious heart defect were convinced by an alternative practitioner that a MORAS machine could measure the child's 'radionics' - a term not in a medical dictionary. Subsequent to its use, a South American herb was used to treat the condition.

"The poor child died and the Coroner has recommended that legal proceedings be commenced against the practitioner.

"To combat dodgy cures and health practices, the Government will:

- Review the existing laws and regulations available to stop peddlers making false health claims, selling untested or unproven health products or conducting potentially unsafe procedures;
- Strengthen the powers to investigate and prosecute quacks.
- Bolster the powers of the health professional boards eg NSW Medical Board to deal with practitioners involved in dodgy practices;
- Increase the penalties for marketing bogus health products;
- Initiate a public education campaign.

"The Government will establish a committee, chaired by Professor John Dwyer, Professor of Medicine at the University of NSW and an immunologist from the Prince of Wales Hospital that will provide expert advice for this review.

"This is not a witch-hunt. Practitioners who have proven or tested products and procedures will not be shut down.

"However, we must stop vulnerable people from being ripped off with completely useless products or being exposed to harm from dangerous or potentially dangerous products or procedures.

"A recently discredited procedure was the Live Blood Cell Analysis by which a self-proclaimed naturopath claimed he could diagnose illnesses by examining a pinprick of a patient's blood under a microscope and devise treatments to cure whatever disease was found.

"But the naturopath, Jeffrey Dummett was fined almost \$34,000 and court costs in May this year for making false health claims as expert medical evidence found Dummett's claims could not possibly be true. However, under current arrangements this does not prevent other spivs hawking the same technique.

"Some of the many products on the market causing concern include:

- Magnetic pulsers or neuro-muscular stimulators - electrical devices you attach to your body. Claims they cure cancers and pathogens including HIV AIDS and Hepatitis viruses. They have no effect ...in fact, some are adapted for use from popular electronic toys.
- Homeopathic vaccines for meningococcal disease, the flu and hepatitis viruses which cannot possibly work because they are unable to stimulate an immune system response
- So-called Computer Regulated Tomography devices supposedly used to diagnose diseases including breast cancer, and which can cause people to forgo x-rays or biopsies. These devices have no capacity to aid in the diagnosis of anything.
- Herbal skin cancer cream which when applied actually burns the skin and doesn't cure breast cancers or melanomas as claimed.

"This is an Australian first. While the overhaul is limited to NSW laws, the crackdown will help people in all States and Territories because many suspicious products are advertised and sold Australia-wide and on the Net.

"A recent world-wide Internet search uncovered 1,400 suspicious medical web sites internationally, 77 of them operating from Australia.

"Unfortunately rip-off merchants are prepared to prey on sick or vulnerable people, so before you buy a health product or agree to a procedure, check with your doctor or other qualified health professional."

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Last Updated : Thursday, 07-Nov-02 16:51:27

URL: [www.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/mediareleases/2002/October/31-10-02.htm](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/mediareleases/2002/October/31-10-02.htm)