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- Front Page
- Forum
- News
- Hong Kong Focus
- Indonesian Focus
- Malaysian Focus
- Philippine Focus
- Singapore Focus
- Industry News
- In Brief
- Sponsored
- Symposium Highlights
 - IT
 - Med Tech
 - In Practice
 - After Hours
 - Humour
 - About Us

CME

- Study Room
- Virtual Library
- Events Calendar
- MediWeb

SERVICES

- Newsletters
- Lifestyle
- MediContact
- Discussion Forum

LEGAL

- Disclaimer
- Code of Conduct
- Privacy Code

ADVERTISING

- Opportunities
- Policies

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21 TO 23 MAY 2005

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Select One

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Website of the Month

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Website of the Month

www.quackwatch.com

The world is flooded with information about health programmes and products that claim to miraculously heal, fortify and sculpt the body. While the information superhighway provides public access to unlimited medical sources, it also constitutes an unregulated vehicle from which the unethical tout "wonder drugs".

The US-founded website - www.quackwatch.com - is devoted to exposing medical fraud, quacks and vitamin pushers. It allows professionals and consumers to monitor "quackery" and test the reliability of health promoters and their treatments.

The site offers a comprehensive list of topics that include general observations about health-related fraud, questionable treatments, products and non-recommended sources of medical advice. There are also many links to educative reports, projects and consumer guidelines for choosing health professionals.

Because the choice of subjects is so extensive, users might find it easier to scroll down the list and click on links marked as "Feature" or "New".

A good starting point would be to read the article "Twenty-five ways to spot quacks and vitamin pushers" in the "General Observations" section. This is a summary of common claims made by questionable health promoters and it also examines how alternative products and dietary supplements on the market sell themselves.

For information about people that have been seriously harmed by quack medical treatments and advice, click on "Victim Case

Studies." One example cited is the death of Ryan Pitzer, a two-month old baby who suffered a heart attack after his parents followed advice from famous American health faddist, Adele Horin in 1978.

Horin had recommended in her book "Let's have healthy children" that 3000 mg potassium chloride could cure acute colic. Ryan's parents followed her instructions - based on the misinterpretation of a 1950's study - and he died soon after the dosage was administered.

Alternative and complementary medicine products also feature prominently and can be found in the section "Questionable Products, Services and Theories". Two topics worth exploring are "Be wary of 'Alternative' methods" and "Cancer: Questionable Therapies".

While the site certainly recommends that consumers maintain a skeptical attitude toward health marketing and false remedies, it does not intend to disparage the proven benefits of some traditional, alternative and complementary therapies. To read about the history of the site, its contributors and members on the advisory board, click on "Mission Statement" in the "About Quackwatch" section. A biography on the site founder, Dr Stephen Barrett, is also available.

Other sites worth book-marking are listed at the bottom of the homepage. These include both humorous links such as "RatbagsDotCom" and "The Quack-files", as well as advisory websites.

The site authors welcome contributions from both professionals and the public and ideas can be posted to the administrators by clicking on "Make a comment" at the top of the opening page. Reports or case studies of "Quackery" can be forwarded to victims@quackwatch.com.

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