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Proposed agenda item for the 2005 White House Conference On Aging (WHCOA):

- To alert and educate the public about the emergence and unprecedented growth of anti-aging quackery
- To propose the allocation of resources and legislation to educate and protect the emerging and current older population from this multi-billion dollar industry.

Dear Dr. McGee and the Policy Committee Members of the 2005 WHCOA,

Thank you so very much for the opportunity to present to you at the Miami, Florida listening session my acute concerns regarding antiaging quackery and its current and future negative impact upon older Americans. Anti-aging quackery was, twenty years ago in 1984, noted by Claude Pepper's subcommittee to be a ten billion dollar industry. Since then, the industry has grown many more times as evidenced by a huge presence on the internet and the emergence of the anti aging industry advocacy group, the American Academy for Anti Aging Medicine, which claims over 12,000 members.

Applicability to the WHCOA: Congress has already identified anti-aging quackery as an important concern that merits immediate and significant attention. However, the events of 9/11, the forces of special interests, inadequate enforcement resources and little in the way of adequate public education have allowed the findings and suggestions of the most recent Senate hearing addressing this issue to be essentially ignored (see reference 2, below).

The 2005 WHCOA is an opportunity to capitalize upon the already demonstrated Congressional interest on this issue and the findings and recommendations produced by Congress in order to educate the public and reinvigorate the legislative process. If allowed to continue unchecked, anti-aging quackery will exact health-related and financial harm to Americans on a grand scale.

Testimony provided at the WHCOA Listening Session, Miami, Florida, August 30, 2004:

As evidenced by this week's Time Magazine's cover story, *Living to 100 (and not regretting it)*, the 70 million strong baby-boomers have become earnestly engaged with the question of how to age well both for their parents and for themselves.

Most unfortunately the information being presented to consumers is highly skewed with aggressive and dishonest marketing by the anti-aging industry. This industry, ranging from the sales of anti-wrinkle cream to the marketing and administration of human growth hormone was labeled by the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on

Aging's Subcommittee on Health and Long-Term Care as a ten billion dollar scandal. And that was in 1984 (1)!

The Senate's Special Committee on Aging released their report on anti-aging hucksterism, *Swindlers, Hucksters, and Snake Oil Salesmen: Hype and Hope, Marketing Anti-Aging Products to Seniors* (2), the day before the horrific events of 9/11, thus receiving very little attention. John M. Taylor, Director of the FDA's Office of Enforcement, indicated in testimony before the committee that the following issues were of significant concern:

- harmful interactions between dietary supplements and prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) pharmaceutical products;
- substituting unproven treatments for proven medical treatments;
- taking products that have no health benefit;
- adverse effects; and,
- the focus of [the] hearing - health fraud.

The quacks and hucksters of the anti-aging industry, who represent a relative fringe yet very monetarily rich segment of the industry, are dangerous for two primary reasons: 1. They deliver a false pernicious message about aging - basically the term anti-aging is anti-old people and 2. With false or misleading exclamations that they can stop and reverse aging, the industry bilks millions of vulnerable and/or gullible people out of their hard-earned money while distracting them from strategies proven to be safe and effective in facilitating healthy aging.

The Select Committee on Aging defined a quack as “. . . anyone who promotes medical schemes or remedies known to be false, or that are unproven, for a profit” (1). According to a systematic review of anti-aging websites and clinics advertising on the internet, anti-aging quackery and hucksterism are pervasive (3).

Human growth hormone, which is perhaps the most blatant example of quackery today, is touted as a fountain of youth. Typing “human growth hormone” into the Google search engine yields approximately 432,000 hits, the vast majority of which are related to marketing and selling it in pill, spray or injectible forms for anti-aging. It is claimed to reverse aging but in reputable scientific circles, it has not been shown to do anything of the sort. Numerous clinical studies cite unacceptably high rates of adverse side effects including new onset diabetes. Animal studies suggest that growth hormone administration actually causes the opposite effects, that is, accelerated aging and increased predisposition to cancer.

Federal law states that distributing or administering human growth hormone for anti-aging or age-related problems is illegal (3). Nonetheless, anti-aging clinics thrive, administering human growth hormone to thousands of gullible and oftentimes vulnerable people. Review of the marketing techniques of the industry revealed 15 common ruses used by many in the industry to market their products (3).

Three important forces have come together to encourage quackery's marked growth: the development of the internet, the aging of the 70 million baby boomers and the 1994

Congressional passage of the Dietary Supplements Health and Education Act (DSHEA, pronounced “d-shay”). DSHEA allows for the marketing and sale of many substances loosely called nutritional supplements (not just vitamins and minerals, but also herbs, botanicals, amino acids, and so-called concentrates and metabolites) without any requirement for demonstrated content, safety or efficacy. Many are marketed as anti-aging products, others for more specific uses such as weight loss or muscle building. Ephedra, marketed for losing weight, was associated with over 14,000 adverse events that went unreported to government officials because DSHEA does not require such reports. It was only after Ephedra was linked to Baltimore Orioles Pitcher Steve Bechler’s death (and found to be linked to four other deaths), that action was taken to ban Ephedra. There are many other substances that have been proven to be dangerous and are banned in other countries, and yet they continue to be sold in this country because of DSHEA.

Consumers and health care providers alike are wise to educate themselves on how to recognize quackery. Congress must reassess the wisdom of DSHEA, which facilitates and, in numerous cases, endangers Americans on a grand scale. In the case of some substances such as human growth hormone, adequate legal safeguards are impotent without adequate resources allocated to enforcement agencies.

References:

1. Quackery: A \$10 Billion Scandal. Subcommittee on Health and Long-Term Care of the Select Committee on Aging; ed 98th Congress, 1984. Committee publication no. 98-435.
2. Swindlers, Hucksters and Snake Oil Salesman: Hype and Hope Marketing Anti-Aging Products to Seniors. United States Senate Special Committee on Aging; ed One Hundred Seventh Congress, First Session. Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, September 10, 2001.
3. Perls T. Anti-aging quackery: Human growth hormone and tricks of the trade -more dangerous than ever. J Gerontology: Biological Sciences 2004;59A:682-691. (attached)

Suggested Other References:

1. Mehlman MJ, Binstock RH, Juengst ET, Ponsaran RS, Whitehouse PJ. Anti-Aging Medicine: Can Consumers be Better Protected? Gerontologist 2004;44:304-310.
2. Reisman NR, Anti-Aging Medicine: The Legal Issues: Legal Issues Associated With the Current and Future Practice of Anti-Aging Medicine. J Gerontology: Biological Sciences 2004 59: B674-B681.
4. Blackman MR, Sorkin JD, Munzer T, et al. Growth hormone and sex steroid administration in healthy aged women and men: a randomized controlled trial. JAMA. 2002;288:2282–2292.

Suggested Additional Experts:

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Again, thank you so very much for your attention to the anti-aging quackery issue. Please note my desire to help the WHCOA in any way I can and I hope that you will call on me to assist in the further development of this issue as an agenda item for the conference.