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MIRAGE in the MARKETPLACE

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MIRAGE *in the* MARKETPLACE

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Self-proclaimed health experts often make exaggerated claims and promise miraculous cures.

Panaceas abound everywhere. New programs, new books, or new products continually flood the marketplace. These materials promote ways to fight disease, slow aging, help you live longer, promote weight loss, increase one's energy level, enhance personal beauty, or show you how to enjoy better health.

Self-proclaimed health experts and over-zealous promoters often make exaggerated and unsupported claims about health, and promise miraculous cures. The consumer should be very cautious, lest they end up spending time and money on unproven gimmicks, gadgets, and gizmos.

Testimonials appear on television in very convincing fashion to authenticate a particular product. Many are simply schemes to make money, a mirage that distorts reality and the truth about health. Health proponents often prey on public fears. Vulnerable groups, such as the ill and the elderly, are often victims of health promoters. Fraudulent health claims may cause a person to not seek appropriate medical care in a timely manner. In addition, false claims may end up confusing the public about what constitutes good health.

It is estimated over one-third of Americans search the Internet for medical information. Furthermore, almost one-half of Internet users admit this information influences their decisions about healthcare and medical treatments. It is well to remember that Web publishing is unregulated. The Internet enables consumers to obtain both good

and misleading (and possibly harmful) information on any health topic.

A careful scrutiny of information and a healthy dose of skepticism are essential. One must always check the source of the information on the Internet, ask if it is reliable, and if it has been verified by an expert. Recently, erroneous information about soy, canola oil, coral calcium, aspartame, and other topics circulated the Internet.

There are a number of red flags which should alert the consumer to question health claims. These include the recommendations that promise a quick fix, recommendations that help sell a product, claims that sound too good to be true (they usually are), and recommendations based on a single research study. We should prove the veracity of everything, hold on to the good, and reject the harmful (1 Thess. 5:21, 22).

Winston Craig is professor of nutrition at Andrews University.

The ill, the elderly, and the overweight

are all targets of health promoters.

