

Educating the consumer

How strange that some people still object to how prominent doctors, excellent pharmaceutical companies, and prestigious hospitals educate the public on radio and television. After all, more than 25 years have passed since the US Supreme Court refused (in its Goldfarb decision) to distinguish between so called learned professions and other trades, followed by the Federal Trade Commission's ruling that the American Medical Association violated antitrust laws by banning advertising and restricting competition between doctors.

Since then we have made much progress in consumer re-education. Prestigious university hospitals now regularly explain in the media that their doctors are at the cutting edge of medicine. Hospitals publicise new approaches to cancer or new scanning devices that detect calcium deposits in the heart years before they cause symptoms. Complete examinations, including cholesterol testing, blood pressure measurements, and stress testing, are offered for \$75 (£48; 70) to \$100 (£64; 93).

Prescription drugs are also regularly promoted on television, often with quotations from scientific papers outlining their benefits and side effects and ending with the injunction to ask your doctor about them. This is especially true of anticholesterol drugs.

Elsewhere private clinics offer personalised treatment from a new type of doctor, who is concerned about the patient as a whole. "When did you last feel well?" asks one such salesperson, suggesting it is time to call this excellent clinic where board certified doctors practise medicine in a completely new way, spending 45 minutes on each appointment, so that the patient and the doctor can map out together a plan to take care of all the patient's health needs, using the best specialists and proven safe alternative medicine methods.

The syllabus for consumer education now includes emu-based gels and herbal patches for weight loss, and testing for calcium in the heart and fat in the blood. In south east Asian literature at airports there is information about rhinoceros horn as an aphrodisiac.

And a daily avalanche on the internet provides consumer education about new methods of achieving rejuvenation and improved virility, about buying Viagra by mail order, or enlarging sexual organs by several inches.