



# HOW TO SPOT HIV/AIDS FRAUD

## WHAT IS HIV/AIDS FRAUD?

HIV fraud is the promotion, advertisement, or sale of products that are supposed to diagnose, treat, or cure HIV when those products have not been proven to be safe and effective for those purposes.

Regular medicine does not yet have a cure for HIV (see Fact Sheet 485.) Because it is a serious illness, many people with HIV disease are willing to try almost anything to get healthy. Some unproven treatments may be harmless, but others can be dangerous. For example, one brand of "Brain Wave Synchronizer" caused epileptic seizures.

Be careful when you choose treatments for HIV disease. This fact sheet will help you evaluate treatments and be sure that you're not dealing with an HIV fraud.

## WARNING SIGNS OF AN HIV FRAUD

If you notice any of these warning signs when you consider an HIV therapy, be very careful! The treatment might still be a good one, but you should ask extra questions about it. If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

- The product **prevents or cures HIV or AIDS**. Researchers have been working hard for over 10 years, but there is not yet any known cure for HIV or AIDS. The only sure way to prevent AIDS is to avoid being infected with the HIV virus.
- The product is a **quick cure for a wide range of ailments**. Most products are effective only against a specific illness or a few closely related medical problems.
- **Personal success stories** are the only evidence that the treatment works. Of course, if a treatment works, you can find people who will tell you about it. But testimonials don't prove that the treatment worked. Look for results of research studies or other evidence.
- Be suspicious if the promoters use key words like **miraculous cure, amazing breakthrough, foolproof, suppressed treatments, or secret ingredients**. These words are often used to make you think that a treatment is valuable even though there may be no proof that it works.

- The treatment was **discovered and tested in another country**, or is **only available outside the US**. Certainly, valuable treatments are developed and tested in other countries. However, many other countries permit health claims without the kinds of proof required in the United States.
- The treatment is **only available privately, for a short time, or from only one source**; or if it **requires payment in advance**. If a product really works, why isn't it advertised and available publicly? This may be a way to get around government regulations.
- You can only get the treatment by **paying to take part in testing an experimental treatment**. When most experimental treatments are tested, people receive them free of charge.

## COMMON SENSE ABOUT UNPROVEN TREATMENTS

You might end up spending a lot of money on treatments that don't work. If you believe they are helping you, and you can afford to pay for them, they might be all right. But remember:

- Some unproven treatments might be harmful to your health.
- Health insurance will not pay for them.
- Using unproven treatments could make you delay using other treatments that really work, giving your illness time to get worse.

## QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK

You should be careful about **any** HIV treatment, and especially if you see any of the warning signs of fraud. It can be difficult to know what's true and what's not, because many legitimate HIV treatments are very expensive and difficult to understand. Here are some questions to ask about HIV treatments:

- Can you give me some written information about the product?
- Which company manufactures this product? How can I contact them?

- Did the Food and Drug Administration approve this product or treatment? If not, why not?
- What uses has the product been tested for? Where can I see the test results?
- What are the side effects, or other risks, of using this product or treatment?
- Whom can my health care provider call for more information?

## TAKE YOUR TIME; CHECK IT OUT

Legitimate health care providers should not be opposed if you want to get more information about a new treatment or product. If you ever feel pressured to make a decision about an HIV therapy before you feel ready, **don't do it!**

Take your time to get more information from sources that you trust, such as:

- Your case manager
- Your HIV health care provider
- An HIV/AIDS service agency
- CDC Health Information at 1-800-342-2437, or e-mail [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)
- The National AIDS Health Fraud Reporting Hotline, (888) 332-1820 offers recorded information in English and Spanish.
- The National AIDS Treatment Information Service at 1-800-448-0440
- Project Inform, a community organization with the National HIV/AIDS Treatment Infoline at 1-800-822-7422.
- The Texas AIDS Health Fraud Information Network at <http://www.tahfin.org>

## THE BOTTOM LINE

HIV disease is very complicated. No cure has been developed yet. There are many different treatments and products that claim to help people with HIV disease. Some of these have not been carefully tested, and some might even be harmful.

Take your time to evaluate any product or treatment, especially if you see any of the warning signs of an HIV fraud.

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