

Avoid Quackery: Medication Support Toolkit in the College of Direct Support

Many times people face difficult or persistent and annoying health problems. During these times it is tempting to look for easy cures. This can leave people vulnerable to being misled about treatments. There are many individuals and companies that make a good living off of other's fears and disappointments. As a direct support professional, you may support someone who you think is being taken advantage of or who is getting ready to make a poor choice about treatment. This toolkit sheet can help you and the people you support make good decisions about alternative treatments.

When to Worry About Scams and Quackery?

1. If the promised benefits of the treatment are far beyond anything that can be offered through established medical approaches. Examples would include:
 - People or treatments that “guarantee” to cure serious or fatal illnesses such as cancer or AIDS.
 - Unreasonable claims for success such as dropping several pounds of weight in a week while eating all you want.
2. When the “seller” discourages you from getting more information or states that information is not available except through mail or email.
3. When a product claims to have “secret ingredients” and/or “no risks.” One that uses only photos and written testimonials as support for effectiveness, without any serious reviews in established journals.

Use common sense: If it was this easy why isn't the treatment widely available and well established?

How to Decide What to Do?

If the treatment is suggested by a doctor, therapist, or healer:

- Ask for information in writing. Ask for the purpose of the treatment and the risk and benefits. Find out what ingredients are in any preparations and the names of any herbs or nutritional supplements.
- Check with professional associations, community groups, licensing bodies, or individuals who would be knowledgeable about this type of treatment or this type of practitioner. Find out if the person is reputable and if the treatment is generally accepted in this community.

If the treatment is advertised:

- Review the information carefully. Get the name, address, and phone number of the company.
- Take the information to a medical practitioner you trust and get their opinion.
- Check with the Better Business Bureau regarding complaints against this company or similar ones.

For both:

- Check medical libraries for reviews regarding the treatment in established medical journals.
- Use information sources provided by your medical insurance provider. (Information phone lines, brochures, etc.)
- Look it up on the internet.

Report problems with scams to the Better Business Bureau, “watch dog” groups, postal authorities, or other local authorities.