

# Shopping For Health Care

## THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

HOW TO CHOOSE THE BEST AND GET THE MOST  
OUT OF EVERY DOLLAR YOU SPEND ON HEALTH CARE:

MEDICAL, SURGICAL, AND DENTAL CARE

INSURANCE PLANS

DRUG PRODUCTS

DIET, SKIN AND BEAUTY AIDS

AND EVERY OTHER ASPECT OF YOUR  
PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

**Harold J. Cornacchia, Ed.D. and  
Stephen Barrett, M.D.**

Foreword by William T. Jarvis, Ph.D.

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*Illustrated*



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**TIMES MIRROR**  
NEW YORK AND SCARBOROUGH, ONTARIO

Publisher: Thomas A. Manning  
Assistant editor: Nancy L. Mullins  
Manuscript editor: Selena Bussen  
Book design: Kay M. Kramer  
Production: Carolyn Biby, Susan Trail

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This is a revised edition of a book previously published by The C.V. Mosby Company entitled *Consumer Health*.

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The New American Library, Inc.,  
1633 Broadway, New York, New York 10019.

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St. Louis, MO 63141

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The C.V. Mosby Company, 11830 Westline Indl. Dr., St. Louis, MO 63141



PLUME TRADEMARK REG. U.S. PAT. OFF. AND FOREIGN COUNTRIES  
REGISTERED TRADEMARK—MARCA REGISTRADA  
HECHO EN FORGE VILLAGE, MASS., U.S.A.

SIGNET, SIGNET CLASSICS, MENTOR, PLUME, MERIDIAN and  
NAL BOOKS are published by The New American Library, Inc.,  
1633 Broadway, New York, New York 10019, in Canada, by  
The New American Library of Canada, Limited,  
81 Mack Avenue, Scarborough, Ontario M1L 1M8.

### Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Cornacchia, Harold J.  
Shopping for health care.

Rev. ed. of: *Consumer health*. 2nd ed. 1980.

"A Plume book."

Bibliography: p.

1. Medical care. 2. Health products. 3. Quacks  
and quackery. 4. Consumer education. 5. Medical  
care—United States. I. Barrett, Stephen, 1934-

II. Title.

RA410.5.C67 1982 362.1 82-6405  
ISBN 0-8016-1140-7 AACR2

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 03/D/355

Printed in the United States of America

### **Whatever your health problem . . .**

Whether you are wondering whether to try contact lenses, or what toothpaste to use,

whether you want to know about Vitamin C and the common cold, or the latest treatments for cancer,

whether you are thinking of taking up jogging, or cutting meat out of your diet,

whether you are looking for a doctor to suit your needs, or for a medical guru to guide you on a different path to health,

whether you are worried about the risks of medical treatment, or the costs, this guide was written for you and for your good—

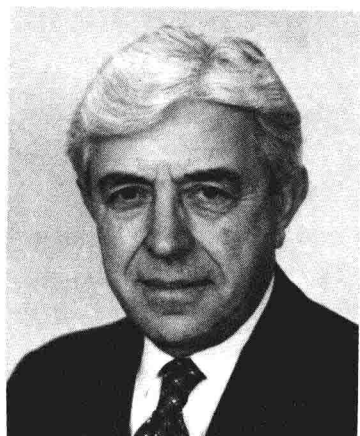
## **Shopping for Health Care**

### **THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO PRODUCTS AND SERVICES**

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**Harold J. Cornacchia**



**Stephen Barrett, M.D.**

### **Harold J. Cornacchia**

Harold J. Cornacchia, Ed.D., professor emeritus of health education, and former department chairman of health education, San Francisco State University, has been an active promoter of the Consumer Bill of Rights in the health marketplace for over 20 years. He believes the consumer is in need of accurate, truthful, and scientific information from reliable sources to make intelligent decisions in regard to the purchase and use of health products and services. He has been a teacher, consultant, and author and is presently serving as a member of the board of directors of the California Council Against Health Fraud.

### **Stephen Barrett, M.D.**

Stephen Barrett, M.D., a practicing psychiatrist, and author and lecturer on consumer health, is a vigorous opponent of health quackery. Since 1970 he has been board chairman of the Lehigh Valley Committee Against Health Fraud, Inc. An expert in medical communications, he is medical consultant to WFMZ-TV, Allentown, Pennsylvania, and he is the consumer health editor of *Nautilus Magazine*. He has been a member of the Committee on Quackery of the Pennsylvania Medical Society and the Committee on Health Fraud of the Pennsylvania Health Council, and he is a scientific advisor to the American Council on Science and Health, serving as consulting editor of its bimonthly newsletter.

## Foreword

Consumer health has much to do with the way we live. It deals with the selection by consumers of the products and services available in the marketplace that have an impact on health. It also involves the advertising, methods of distribution, and techniques of selling used to promote health-related items. Almost all health behavior therefore is a form of consumer health behavior.

In recent years there has been a shift toward the desirability for less government interference in our lives. Minimum government regulation creates a situation that naturally evokes caveat emptor (let the buyer beware), the so-called law of the marketplace. This concept is based on the classical situation in which two men are trading horses. Each man is assumed to be equally expert in evaluating good horseflesh; therefore, if one gains the advantage over the other, it is just too bad. The loser should have been more alert.

The practical necessity for caveat emptor is obvious. No government can monitor every business transaction or protect those who insist on being fooled. However, it must be recognized that caveat emptor cannot be completely applied to matters that affect health. There is almost no way the consumer can acquire the sophisticated scientific knowledge and highly technical skill of the suppliers of health products and services. For this reason, a measure of regulation and supervision by government as well as by the consumer, or caveat vendor (let the seller beware), is essential in the health marketplace.

In reality, we are all consumers and providers. Most of our daily endeavor is spent contributing either directly or indirectly to the provision of products and services to be consumed. Therefore, it is wrong to polarize the situation into a "we-they" dichotomy. It must be viewed as a system in which we all live and participate.

There is inherent imbalance in the health marketplace, however. Businesses are well organized, self-financing, and favored by legislators. Consumers are unorganized, unfinanced, and generally politically ineffective. Out of this disorder, self-appointed consumer advocates sometimes arise and tell us that they are our spokespeople. Although some of these individuals are sincere

and do make a contribution, others use the role to advance political causes or for personal aggrandizement. On occasions, business trade associations or lobbies have passed themselves off as consumer organizations in support of legislation to further their own self-interests. Assailed from all sides, consumers exist in a "crisis of confidence" and wonder whom they can trust.

During the twentieth century, our society has made significant progress in the protection of the consumer through federal and state laws. These include honest labeling, bans on fraudulent claims, and the requirement that both safety and effectiveness be proven on products promoted as therapeutic. Such laws do not appear to be overprotective or oppressive to a healthy business climate but simply demand ethics and quality in the marketplace. They need or support and vigilance because there are those who would take these basic safeguards from us if they could. Organized quackery is trying to do this in the name of "health freedom"—by diverting attention from the fact that regulatory laws are aimed at vendors who would exploit the gullible, the desperate, and the dying. By claiming that sick people are being "denied the freedom to choose," promoters of quackery have succeeded in convincing many lawmakers to legalize what they do. People can be misled into demanding laws that work to their own detriment when well-organized efforts are made by special interest groups. Quacks have also shown themselves to be able to win public sympathy by claiming to be victims of persecution by "big government," "organized medicine," or other symbols of "Big Brotherism." Clearly, legal remedies have great limitations without strong grass roots support by the public; and to be supportive, people must be *informed*.

These are some of the reasons why education is the key to quality in the marketplace. Only well-informed people can assure that we have good laws and can insist on proper enforcement. Only alert consumers can be expected to make wise choices from the many items available in the health marketplace. That is what this book is about. It will help you become a more intelligent consumer and equip you to be a better citizen.

It is not the purpose of consumer health education to emphasize what is praiseworthy about the health marketplace but to warn about things which are worthless, dangerous, or harmful. It says, "Buyer beware." Hopefully, it will also aid us in better understanding human nature and its needs, wants, hopes, and fears. These motivations are exploited by advertisers, quacks, and even sometimes inadvertently by those we love. Awareness of our weaknesses and vulnerabilities is essential to the discovery of our strengths. One of the highest goals of consumer health education is to help us discover that the ultimate protection lies within ourselves.

The authors of this book have brought together a unique and powerful combination of ingredients. Professor Cornacchia is a scholar and teacher with a thorough knowledge of his field. His first edition of this book was the finest contribution yet made to the field of consumer health education. Dr. Barrett brings to the scene a medical background plus the vitality of a consumer activist. He is by far the nation's most aggressive opponent of health fraud and quackery. A practicing psychiatrist, he also adds a deeper dimen-

sion to our understanding of the psychodynamics of controversial health matters. These men are dedicated to protecting the health consumer and have shown themselves to be worthy of the public's trust.

**William T. Jarvis, Ph.D.**

*President, California Council*

*Against Health Fraud, Inc.;*

*Professor, Loma Linda University*



## **Preface**

The desire to attain good health for a comfortable and productive life is universal. Widespread misinformation and delusion plus a bewildering array of orthodox and unorthodox health products and services in the marketplace complicate the pursuit of this goal.

While uninformed consumers place blind faith in whoever or whatever promises the most, intelligent consumers are skeptical. They seek scientific answers and ask the following:

Is it safe?

Is it economical?

How shall I know it is effective?

Do I have freedom to choose?

What should I do when victimized?

This book is designed to help individuals make decisions that protect their health and their pocketbooks. It provides valid information and guidance to reliable sources for wise selection of products and services. It offers suggestions for consumer action when deception, misrepresentation, or fraud is encountered in the marketplace.

**Harold J. Cornacchia, Ed.D.**  
**Stephen Barrett, M.D.**

## **Consumer health decisions**

People are frequently faced with decisions to purchase and use a variety of health products and services.

How should one select a physician, a dentist, or other health specialist?

What aspirin or aspirin-like products should be purchased? Why? Should they be used?

Should contact lenses be purchased? Are they safe? Are soft contacts better?

What health or dental insurance will provide the greatest protection?

When should one visit a physician, a dentist?

What should be done about excessive or unreasonable physicians' or dentists' fees?

Are television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and books reliable sources of health information?

How can reliable sources of health information be identified?

Should supplementary vitamins and minerals be purchased and used? Is vitamin E helpful?

What is the safe way to lose and control weight? Are diet pills helpful or harmful?

Which cosmetics are safe to use? Which are effective?

Should organic, natural, or health foods be purchased to aid one's health? Are they more expensive?

Should vitamin C be used to prevent colds? To cure colds? Is it hazardous to use?

How can the best protection against sun exposure be provided?

What agencies and organizations aid in the protection of the consumer?

How does one select a nursing or convalescent home? A hospital?

Should dental repair kits be used to fix dentures?

What kind of toothbrush or toothpaste should be purchased?

Should an individual undergo surgery when it is recommended by a physician?

Who can help to determine the need for hearing aids? Eyeglasses?

Does the fact that a health device or machine is patented assure its safety and effectiveness?

Will electric vibrators and massage machines help one to lose weight?

Are special foods and medicines needed to prevent and control arthritis and cancer?

Will DMSO aid people with arthritis?

Should laetrile be used to prevent and control cancer?

Should one self-diagnose and self-medicate?

How can a complaint about a health product or service be registered?

Are periodic health examinations necessary? How often? How much should they cost?

What kinds of equipment help with physical fitness?

What medicines purchased in drugstores are safe and effective?

Should laxatives be purchased and used?

Will wearing a copper bracelet help arthritis?

What products help to grow, restore, or remove hair?

How can wrinkles be removed? Will plastic surgery help?

Should brand or generic name drugs be purchased?

How can a quack or quackery be recognized?

Should people budget for health care?

To make intelligent decisions consumers must be well informed.

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# 1

## The health marketplace

Today you can cheat an honest man, not only easily but often.

**Gentry: Vulnerable Americans**

Consumers are linked together by one cause. They don't want to get screwed.

**David Pittle, Commissioner**  
**Consumer Product Safety Commission**

Science and medical technology have revolutionized our concepts of health. The ability to control disease has focused our attention on preserving health and prolonging life. In response to this emphasis, the consumer marketplace has been flooded by health products, procedures, facilities, and equipment of every description.

Technology has similarly affected our life-style. In a country where goods and services are readily available and affluence abounds, it is not surprising that many people feel that health, like any material good, is purchasable. Questions should be raised as to which of the products available are really beneficial and whether money can really buy good health.

The desire for an easier life and more material goods have unquestionably been stimulated by advertising. People seek more leisure and less work, more money with less effort, more pleasure and less pain, more riding and less walking; they want simplistic solutions to life's problems. In the health area, people want simple, quick, and painless ways to alleviate discomfort and illness. They search for panaceas. They hope the solution to illness will be found in a bottle or tablet, or in some other convenient form. They wish to remain youthful, vigorous, and active, enjoying fully the pleasures of living and having a productive life.

Members of the business world are well aware of the motivation and behavior of individuals. They also realize that scientific information about health, with its many complexities, inconsistencies, and uncertainties, can be very confusing to the average citizen.

These factors have enabled quackery and the promotion of questionable health products to thrive in the United States for many years. Consumers have



been encouraged through the media to diagnose and medicate themselves without adequate information. Frequently they purchase products and services that have little or no value—or may even be harmful. For the most part, individuals have been at the mercy of the seller.

This book has been designed to help consumers understand the social and emotional influences they encounter in the health marketplace. By making informed choices, they can protect their health and their pocketbooks.

### **NEED FOR CONSUMER PROTECTION**

The consumer movement developed in the United States as people began to notice how much the business world was influencing their lives. It has had considerable impact on advertising controls and on industry in general.

Consumerism emerged because many people concluded that making money should not be the only object of our economic system. The so-called consumer revolution resulted from a growing public demand for justice and fair play in the marketplace. This represented a significant change in the national value system.

Deception, untrue or misleading claims, and fraud in the marketplace in regard to food, drugs, devices, and cosmetics have frequently been deliberate. The lack of the application of ethical principles in dealing with consumers is attested to by Ralph Lee Smith, author, and Senator Edward M. Kennedy. Smith wrote:

The language of modern advertising is suited to hiding, partially or completely, the truths of science. . . . The great new advances in medical knowledge lend themselves easily to such trickery. Language is debased and science exploited to bring profits by misrepresenting the facts about personal health.

Kennedy remarked, "It is industry which strongly protects the profits but only weakly protects the healing and the rights of people."

The need for the protection of the consumer led to the emergence of the emphasis on the "let-the-seller-beware" (caveat vendor) concept rather than the "let-the-buyer-beware" (caveat emptor) concept and to the promulgation of the Consumer Bill of Rights by former President John F. Kennedy.

### **Let the seller beware (caveat vendor)**

Virginia H. Knauer, special assistant to the president for consumer affairs, has stated that our greatest challenge is to heighten consumers' awareness of their rights and to educate them about the marketplace and their role in it:

We need a concerned public that shops for value, demands more information about products, is discriminating about advertisements, suspects offers of something-for-nothing, and is vocal about the abuses of the marketplace. . . . The individual learns to play his role as a citizen, organizes for citizen action, and makes his voice heard.

Citizen-advocate Ralph Nader supported and amplified Knauer's comment when he remarked: