

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations



**Department of Human Services
Division of Elderly Affairs**

RHODE ISLAND SENIOR BEAT

BY: Larry Grimaldi, Chief of Information & Public Relations
462-0509 lgrimaldi@dea.ri.gov

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BE AWARE OF HEALTH CARE SCAMS

CRANSTON --- We all remember that timeless consumer warning, “If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.” Yet when it comes to health care scams, some seniors still fall prey to remarkable and clearly implausible scams touting miracle cancer cures, products that can turn back the hands of time, and make those arthritis pains disappear in a matter of a few minutes. Every day, we are bombarded by ads on the Internet, television infomercials, magazines, telemarketing, and direct mail that promote a new drug or a miraculous cure.

Outside of scamming money from unsuspecting or vulnerable seniors, these alleged miracle cures don’t work. In some cases, they may be medically harmful. In fact, the promise of a phantom cure can keep you from getting care that you need to treat and manage chronic medical conditions.

The scam artists usually target those with diseases that have no known current cure such as diabetes, arthritis, or Alzheimer’s. In addition to claims of quick, easy, and painless cures for these diseases, anti-aging pills and cancer remedies top the list. None of the quack claims are substitutes for proven methods of prevention and treatment. Before you buy any product that claims exceptional and previously undiscovered results, always talk your doctor or health care professional.

While our culture still places considerable value on “staying young,” no treatments have been proven to slow down or reverse the natural process of growing older. The keys to maintaining health and independence are still rooted in some very basic principles. Eat a nutritious diet; exercise regularly; get the proper rest; and keep your mind active. While these measures may not be dramatic, they are the only ways to preserve your health and well-being.

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**John O. Pastore Center, Hazard Building / 2nd Floor
74 West Road, Cranston, RI 02920
Telephone 401-462-3000, Fax 401-462-0503, TTY 401-462-0740
Web Site: www.dea.ri.gov**

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It's highly unlikely that gimmicks such as magnets, copper bracelets, or any other form of jewelry can cure arthritis. Rest, exercise, heat, and some medications can lessen the symptoms of arthritis. But the illusion of a cure, often times bolstered by bogus testimonials, still persists.

Scams involving cancer cures are particularly dangerous and reprehensible. Scam artists prey on the fears, and at the same time hopes, of the cancer victim. By dabbling in unproven and dangerous therapies, the cancer patient can lose valuable treatment time and damage any chances to control and treat the disease. No "one size fits all" cancer treatment exists. The most prudent course of action is to talk about treatment options with your doctor. Get a second opinion. But never fall prey to claims of miraculous cures.

Seniors should be particularly vigilant when it comes to health insurance scams. Buying insurance that covers just one condition, such as cancer, is generally not a good idea. Medicare, supplemental health insurance plans, Medicare Advantage plans, and Medicare Prescription Drug plans (Part D) cover a wide range of treatments. It's always a good idea to make sure that a health insurance plan being offered to you is approved and licensed by the state Department of Business Regulations or the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS).

The National Institute of Health (NIH) details those red flags that you should look for in any health care product claim. Don't fall for product claims that promise a quick or painless cure. Be wary of any product that claims to have a secret or ancient formula. Don't buy any product or service that can be ordered only by mail, or from just one company. View product testimonials with a critical eye. Watch out for products that claim to cure a wide range of ailments. Be skeptical of products that claim to cure any medical condition, such as diabetes or Alzheimer's disease that have not been cured by medical science. Don't fall for the "money back guarantee," "free gift," or "special promotion" pitch lines. Don't purchase products that are advertised as having a limited supply, or that require advance payments.

The age of the snake oil salesman may be gone, but the spirit of the ancient scam artist lives on. The only difference is that today's scammers use modern communications tools such as the Internet, television, telemarketing, or direct mail. The results are the same. You are buying a worthless product. You may not only be out some money, you may also be damaging your health.

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For more information on health care scams, call the Food and Drug Administration at 1-888-463-6332, or go to www.fda.gov. You can also contact the NIH Information Center at 1-800-222-2225, or go to www.nia.nih.gov. The TTY number is 1-800-222-4225.

Senior Journal: The Senior Journal cable television program is devoted to exploring the issues of growing older and the challenges faced by adults with disabilities in Rhode Island. The Senior Journal is produced by senior volunteers and adults with disabilities, and is sponsored by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Division of Elderly Affairs (DEA), with the support of Rhode Island Public, Education, and Government Access Television. The Senior Journal is broadcast on Sundays at 5:00 p.m., Mondays at 7:00 p.m., and Tuesdays at 11:30 a.m. over statewide interconnect cable channel 13 and Verizon channel 32.

From May 19 through May 28, *Pilgrim Senior Center* will be aired. Paul Roberti of East Providence, program host and producer, interviews Meg Underwood, director, and Kathleen Bennett, resource specialists for the Pilgrim Senior Center in Warwick.

From June 2 through June 11, *East Providence Senior Center* will be broadcast. Roberti interviews Bob Rock, executive director of the East Providence Senior Center.

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The Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Division of Elderly Affairs (DEA) is responsible for the development and implementation of a comprehensive system of programs and services for Rhode Islanders ages 60 and older and for adults with disabilities. Questions or requests for additional information on the issues of growing older, or for issues concerning adults with disabilities in Rhode Island should be directed to: Larry Grimaldi, Rhode Island Senior Beat, Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Division of Elderly Affairs, 74 West Road, Cranston, RI 02920 or faxed to 462-0545. The e-mail address is lgrimaldi@dea.ri.gov.