



ISSUE 67

# SCAMS AWARENESS NEWSLETTER

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WELCOME TO OUR

## Monthly Newsletter

Health Scams: when criminals target our wellbeing



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Scammers are always looking for new ways to part people from their money, and one area that continues to grow is health-related fraud. Unlike many scams, health scams exploit concerns about our wellbeing, independence and quality of life. They can be especially convincing because they often focus on conditions that become more common with age.

Whether it's a miracle cure for arthritis, a supplement claiming to improve memory, a fake online pharmacy, a mobility aid advertised as a revolutionary breakthrough, or a treatment promising to restore hearing or eyesight, the message is usually the same: "This could change your life." Unfortunately, many of these products and services fail to deliver what they promise. Some are ineffective, some are deliberately misleading, and some are outright scams.

## Why older people are targeted

As we get older, many of us become more conscious of our health. We may be managing long-term conditions, attending regular medical appointments, caring for a partner, or looking for ways to remain independent for as long as possible. Advertisements are often carefully designed to appeal to common concerns such as:

- Arthritis and joint pain
- Hearing loss
- Sight loss
- Memory problems
- Reduced mobility
- Diabetes
- Poor circulation
- Sleep difficulties



Rather than selling a product, they are often selling hope. Some claim to offer breakthrough treatments that doctors supposedly don't want you to know about, supported by dramatic photographs and glowing testimonials. The aim is to create an emotional response and encourage people to make a purchase before taking time to think critically about the claims being made.

## The rise of fake online pharmacies



Many people now buy healthcare products online, and there are plenty of legitimate online pharmacies operating in the UK. However, criminals have also entered this market. Fake online pharmacies often look professional, using medical images, customer reviews and official-sounding language to appear genuine.

Some websites take payment but never send products. Others supply counterfeit medicines that may contain incorrect ingredients or dosages. Personal and financial information may also be stolen. One warning sign is a website willing to sell prescription-only medicines without any form of medical assessment or consultation. Legitimate pharmacies have a responsibility to ensure medicines are supplied safely and appropriately. If something seems unusually easy or bypasses normal healthcare procedures, it is worth asking why.

## Health scams on social media

Many health scams begin with an advertisement on social media. You may see products claiming to restore hearing, improve eyesight, eliminate joint pain, boost memory or reverse the effects of ageing. These adverts often look professional and may include people in white coats, references to medical research or endorsements from celebrities, television personalities, doctors and other trusted public figures. However, appearances can be deceptive.

Criminals can steal photographs, edit videos and use AI to make it appear that a trusted public figure is recommending a product when they have no connection to it. Some adverts also falsely claim that a product has been featured on programmes such as BBC Breakfast, ITV's This Morning or recommended by NHS doctors.

Just because an advert appears on a well-known website, social media platform or features a familiar face does not mean it has been independently verified. Before purchasing any health-related product, take time to carry out your own research and seek advice from a trusted healthcare professional.

## Mobility aids and independence products

Advertisements frequently promote mobility scooters, stair lifts, hearing devices and other equipment that many older people genuinely need. While many legitimate companies operate in this market scammers have recognised that these items are often purchased by people looking to maintain their independence and quality of life.

Some adverts promote products that are poor quality, overpriced or never arrive. Others make unrealistic claims about what a device can achieve, suggesting it can eliminate pain, reverse medical conditions or restore mobility in ways that are simply not supported by evidence.

Be particularly cautious of products claiming to provide instant relief, miraculous improvements or results that sound too good to be true. Genuine healthcare and mobility products may improve quality of life, but they rarely deliver the dramatic transformations often promised in scam advertisements.



## When scammers target pet owners

Health scams do not just affect people. Many pet owners now purchase medications, supplements and treatments online for their dogs, cats and other animals. Criminals have recognised this as another opportunity.

Fake websites may offer flea treatments, worming products, prescription medications or supplements for pets. In some cases, products may never arrive. In others, the products supplied may be counterfeit or ineffective.

Scammers know that concern for a pet's wellbeing can lead people to act quickly. As with medicines for people, it is sensible to buy from reputable suppliers and seek advice from your vet if you are unsure.



## The hidden cost of health scams

Losing money is often only part of the problem. Health scams can expose personal information such as names, addresses, dates of birth and medical details, which can be valuable to criminals.

The more information a scammer has, the easier it becomes for them to target victims with additional scams in the future. Health scams can expose personal information such as names, addresses, dates of birth and medical details, which can be valuable to criminals. In some cases, personal information may be sold to other criminal groups, increasing the likelihood of further scam attempts.

There is also the potential risk to health. Taking unregulated medicines, supplements or treatments can sometimes cause harm, particularly if they interact with prescribed medication or delay someone from seeking appropriate medical advice.



- Be cautious of products that claim to cure multiple conditions or promise dramatic results.
- Be wary of claims that a product has been "suppressed" by doctors, the NHS or pharmaceutical companies.
- Be sceptical of advertisements that rely heavily on celebrity endorsements, emotional testimonials or claims that a product has been featured on well-known television programmes or news websites.
- Avoid clicking on links contained in unexpected emails, text messages or social media advertisements.
- Take time to research unfamiliar companies before making a purchase.
- Speak to your GP, pharmacist, optician, audiologist, vet or another trusted professional if you are unsure about a product's claims.
- Most importantly, remember that genuine healthcare solutions rarely rely on pressure tactics, countdown timers or claims of miraculous results.

If you are affected by the content of this bulletin, you can talk to us. Our Scams Awareness and Aftercare Team can offer free support, advice and guidance. Contact our team today on:



01625 612958 (OPTION 5)



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Before buying a health-related product online, ask yourself:

- Is the seller reputable and easy to contact?
  - Are the claims realistic?
  - Does the product promise a miracle cure?
  - Does the advert rely heavily on a celebrity, television personality or public figure?
  - Have I independently verified that any endorsement is genuine?

