

## ANTI-AGEING MEDICINES

### **An age-old scam**

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"Since my anti-ageing doctor started me on supplements of growth hormone, DHEA and testosterone, with mega-doses of antioxidants and chelation therapy, I feel like a new man!" And with a sly wink, he adds: "And I feel like I'm 20 years old with my wife. It's just amazing."



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The last decade has seen a massive growth of so-called anti-ageing medicine, typified by this sort of testimonial sales pitch. This might seem surprising, since there are currently no verified treatments for human ageing, yet duping the elderly by selling them bogus treatments for ageing is a venerable tradition. Today it is big business: according to the American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine (A4M) the US anti-ageing industry alone rakes in \$56 billion annually.

Let the buyer beware, one might argue – they only have themselves to blame. Yet surely elderly consumers need some form of protection against this racket. For starters, the anti-ageing scam may be harmful in a number of respects. First of all, some treatments may be detrimental to health: for example, growth hormone 'supplements' can cause high blood pressure and tumour growth. Secondly, consumers may misguidedly use ineffective treatments in place of validated therapies that could really help them. Thirdly, people may hurt themselves financially by frittering away their limited resources on futile therapies.

For biogerontologists, the knowledge that their discoveries may be misused to swindle elderly people is particularly depressing. Individual researchers have tried to speak out against bogus anti-ageing treatments and practitioners, but this can be a tricky business. Ageing researchers Jay Olshansky and Thomas Perls recently lampooned the A4M, and are now facing a \$125 million lawsuit. Ultimately, only legislation can reduce this form of exploitation of older people.

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