COVID Quackery: CSPI Targets Joseph Mercola's Magical Coronavirus Cures

By Alex Berezow, PhD — July 22, 2020

We normally butt heads with the Center for Science in the Public Interest. But its recent attack on Joseph Mercola’s magical COVID cures deserves praise. CSPI could be a great organization if it focused more on eliminating quack medicine and less on labeling bacon as causing cancer.

We are not fans of the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI). ACSH was founded in part to debunk baseless fearmongering, and the folks at CSPI are professionals at promoting junk science.

Consider a fundraising letter they released last year. It mixed legitimately good information (such as the dangers of consuming raw milk) with total garbage (like claiming that sugar substitutes cause cancer). The organization undermines public confidence in the safety of our food supply by endorsing bizarre, ideologically driven policies like placing cancer warning labels on hot dogs and bacon.

But even the proverbial blind squirrel finds a nut once in a while.
CSPI Targets Snake Oil Salesman Dr. Joseph Mercola

And, indeed, what a nut CSPI has found. In its latest campaign [5], the organization is targeting Dr. Joseph Mercola, infamous purveyor [6] of snake oil and other alternative medicine quackery, for selling products that he claims can help treat or prevent COVID-19. CSPI has collated a list of potentially illegal claims [7], and it is asking for the FDA and FTC to crack down. Right on!

Before we get to the issue at hand, let us gently remind you of who "Crazy Joe" Mercola is. He has:

- Claimed that Zika is not caused by a virus [8] but by vitamin A deficiency
- Said that women should avoid mammograms [9] to detect breast cancer
- Donated millions to anti-vaxxers [10]

Now, the doctor wants to treat coronavirus, and like Mr. Haney from Green Acres, he's got some crap to sell. For instance, he claims that molecular hydrogen -- that would be the gas that caused the Hindenburg to explode -- can treat COVID-19. It cannot. It does not do anything [11]. But that doesn't stop him from selling magnesium tablets that generate a tiny bit of hydrogen gas for you to chug down. He also claims that melatonin (a sleep aid) fights coronavirus, and he repeats disproven nonsense about hydroxychloroquine helping to treat COVID.

Mercola is no stranger to receiving warning letters from the FDA [12]. And it's no wonder. Besides the myriad quack products he sells, he has set up a coronavirus page that provides 11 tips [13] on how to combat the coronavirus. A few are true, a few are dubious, and a few are outright junk science. Of course, mixing the true with the untrue is a great strategy to sell quack products, so let's examine his claims:

#1. Wash your hands. (TRUE.)
#2. Address diabetes and hypertension. (TRUE.)
#3. Boost immunity with nutrients. (FALSE. Dietary supplements will not "boost" your immune system.)
#4. Increase vitamin D intake. (DUBIOUS. Only people who are deficient in vitamin D [14] may want to take a supplement.)
#5. Vitamin C is vital. (FALSE. Vitamin C supplementation is nearly useless for treating or preventing viral infections.)
#6. Use quercetin. (FALSE. The FDA has issued warning letters [15] to other companies that sell quercetin as an anti-inflammatory drug.)
#7. Get plenty of sleep. (PROBABLY TRUE. This is generally good health advice.)
#8. Get adequate sunshine. (DUBIOUS. Mercola ties it to the body’s vitamin D production, but this is itself dubious. See #4.)
#9. Exercise boosts immunity. (PROBABLY TRUE. Exercise is always good advice.)
#10. Stay hydrated. (PROBABLY TRUE. This is generally good health advice.)
#11. Try pre-, pro-, and sporebiotics. (FALSE. Mercola claims that the bacterium Prevotella might interact with the coronavirus to create the symptoms of COVID-19. This is unproven.)

CSPI Could Be Great

Let's hope CSPI is successful in getting the FDA and FTC to crack down on Mercola's magical
coronavirus cures. It would be a big win for consumers and evidence-based medicine. An even bigger win would be if CSPI knocked off its stupid war on bacon and focused its efforts on removing quack medicine from store shelves.


Links
[12] https://quackwatch.org/11ind/mercola/