

March is Fraud Prevention Month and the [Competition Bureau of Canada](#) has some fabulous information on their website to help consumers avoid falling victim. Read on.

A December 2008 Statistics Canada survey found that 8.7 million Canadians used the internet to search for health-related information, with almost a quarter of them looking for alternative remedies. Of these 8.7 million people, only 38% spoke to their health-care professional about what they found.

In March 2008, the Competition Bureau of Canada launched [Project False Hope](#) . With the tagline “The fight against cancer is hard enough, don’t let fraud make it harder”, its aim is to target cancer-related fraud online and combat cancer fraud through education and enforcement. At the time of its launch, the project had already uncovered dozens (now hundreds) of Canadian-operated sites that were offering shady products that fell under the false and misleading provisions of the Competition Act. As March is Fraud Prevention Month in Canada and around the world, here is a brief look at Project False Hope, just one of the fraud-busting programs offered by the government of Canada.

Probably not widely known, the Competition Bureau is an independent law enforcement agency that protects and promotes competitive markets, while enabling informed consumer choices. It provides consumers with information on how to protect themselves against fraudulent claims. The Bureau uses internet surveillance and other techniques to avoid online scams and works in cooperation with, among others, Health Canada, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and in this instance, the [Canadian Cancer Society](#) .

Project False Hope features two interactive online tools to educate consumers on how to recognize scams:

o Anatomy of a Health Scam is designed to teach you how to recognize tactics used by scammers. The premise is a bogus website containing some of the “trick of the trade”. When you roll your mouse over the text, a pop-up appears and informs you how fraudsters might phrase something, or why they would use certain tactics to lure you. For example, creating a false sense of urgency, use of lots of technical language and testimonials, pretending they have found a miracle and they are the only ones to have it...

o The Health Fraud Awareness Quiz tests your knowledge of the tactics used and teaches you how to avoid falling victim. It is a short and informative quiz, consisting of eight true or false questions, such as “products that promise to do it all, such as cure cancer, shrink tumours and treat diabetes often do nothing” and “natural and herbal remedies must be safe”.

To quote Andrea Rosen, Acting Deputy Commissioner of the Competition Bureau: “Swindling people living with cancer is one of the most despicable forms of fraud. Consumers should be sceptical of health-related products or services that look too good to be true, and should always speak to a health-care professional before trying any new treatment.” Consumers are also encouraged to report suspicious-looking websites.

A cancer diagnosis is devastating. In their desperate need for solutions, people might search online for health information, only to be exposed to fraudulent and unproven products, claims and cures. Fortunately, for every huckster, there is a helping hand. The important thing, though, is knowing which is which.

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