

EDITORIAL

MEDICINES (ADVERTISEMENT AND SALE) (AMENDMENT) ACT, 1968

Advertisement has come to be a byword in the modern society, and a modern man is to a large extent influenced by skilful advertisers to eat certain types of food, wear certain styles of clothes, affect certain mannerisms of living, and even to express certain shades of opinion. Although some may aver that independent choice, through the exercise of free will and matured wisdom, exists in spite of aggressive persuasion, authoritative sources tend to suggest that the will is free only within the framework of upbringing and educational indoctrination, and maturity of judgement unfortunately does not come to most people till late in life. Hence the finding that subliminal suggestion may be effective causes public protest against that form of advertising in Britain some years ago, and brain washing figures prominently in recent years when returned captives had to explain their failure to live up to expectations.

It is precisely because there is much power in advertisement, and also so little public resistance to such an onslaught, that responsible government and bodies frame laws and regulations to prevent unfair exploitation. And it is during an illness that a person is most susceptible, and hence most in need of protection. In Singapore and Malaysia like in many other countries, advertising know-how has been employed to lead the public into seeking unproved regimen of therapy and untried and sometimes dangerous medicinal products. Charlatans of this category are adept in exploiting the loopholes in law, and the suggestiveness of words to sell their useless wares and proffer their dubious art. They are quick to masquerade

under the cover of modern advances and ancient remedies. The society owes a duty to the sick and infirm to see that they do not get their misfortunes further aggravated.

The past legislation has proved totally inadequate in that it merely provides a list of diseases about which advertisement of curative agents are prohibited. Hence, no one may advertise a drug to treat cancer, cause abortion or cure leprosy, but purveyors of deceit soon find complete freedom to peddle agents purported to remove tumors, amenorrhoea, and blood infection! Moreover, the old law does not prevent anyone from professing the ability to treat those prohibited diseases as long as no medical product is advertised!

The present amendment is designed to stop these loopholes and in doing so, the medical profession finds that it now comes under the law and its own ethics regarding personal advertisement, for it is no longer permissible to advertise personal skill without infringement of the law. Whereas a doctor unwise enough to advertise his own skill in the past would come up against his peers and be dealt with according to the rules of his colleagues, he now finds that he is also committing an offence under the present amendment carrying a definite penalty.

However, no doctor should feel anxious about this new prohibition, for in any case, he would not advertise himself, and further, in the interest of the public, he must be more than willing to lose more than that of his personal freedom.

Gwee Ah Leng
