

Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n Roll

How a brave woman set out to cut through the misinformation undergrowth



Loretta Marron has degrees in science and business and hails from Burpengary in Queensland.

In mid-2004, we were contacted by a new subscriber from Queensland, who sought our assistance in exposing the many medical and other myths that were being published in features and advertisements in magazines aimed at Seniors in the population. She particularly asked for advice on a booklet she was producing for Seniors that would alert them to various dubious products and services offered to them. *The Skeptic's* medical experts were delighted to give her advice and to review her publication.

Loretta Marron has persevered with her quest and we have asked her to tell us about her activities, for which we have the utmost admiration. She has done so below and she asks for feedback from interested Skeptics.

The events and opportunities of 2004 led me on an evolutionary journey that was fuelled by my passion for 'seeking medical evidence'. It also helped me cope with the

shock of being diagnosed with cancer. A year that started with really bad news has ended with something really good: two great new information sources that I believe will help GPs, their patients and their families.

The journey started when a well-meaning friend (an agricultural scientist, no less) told me she had read a book *Sharks Don't Get Cancer*, and that shark cartilage shrank cancerous tumours. I was in the middle of radiotherapy following cancer surgery, and like anyone in that situation, eager to get well. But I had heard of the author, William Lane, and his fake claims. I'm grateful that my friend cared enough about me (misguided though she was) to offer the suggestion, so I promised myself that I would deal with this issue when I was in a better frame of mind.

A few months later when my life started again, I posted my friend a bulky package, along with a short note thanking her for her support, and suggesting that she might find the contents interesting. I had included several printouts, one from a

Quack Watch website, which states that in December 1999 the US Food and Drug Administration sought a permanent injunction against Lane for unproven claims, and another printout detailing the research that shows sharks **do** get cancer. The next time we met she thanked me and she apologised for her earlier advice. Her response supported my belief that most people do want to know the facts.

I find the Internet a great source of information if you can find it amongst the quackery and sales. To help other people like myself, I put my computer skills to work and produced a booklet called *Handy Health Hints for Seniors*. It contains some brief medical advice (mostly common sense — I'm not a doctor), backed up by some great health websites. I received considerable advice and guidance from family, friends, several enthusiastic skeptics and some amazing GPs.

It took my mind off my medical condition and gave me a new focus. I became a woman with a mission. Spending many hours on the internet I selected a range of well researched medical websites sorting

fact from fiction; I was Don Quixote against the windmill, David against Goliath, St George against the dragon, and undoubtedly a very boring individual.

When I finally finished the booklet, being quite pleased with the final result, I showed my months of hard work to my own GP, Dr Joanne Woodford. I also sent a few copies to my local library and copies to my surgeon and my oncologist — both whom will see me regularly for many years to come — and the webmasters of the links I used.

My GP immediately asked for 100 copies of the booklet. My local library asked me to co-partner in a training course for seniors and a Melbourne psychiatrist, Dr David Horgan, suggested that I should widen the scope of my booklet to include families, and change my training medium to the internet. He offered me the website www.healthinformation.com.au. The journey continued.

The latter part of 2004 was spent learning, searching and making choices as I scanned through thousands web links. Under the guidance of my GP, I now believe I have

set up an easy-to-use directory containing a selection of over 300 evidence-based health websites from Australia and overseas, covering both orthodox medicine and natural therapies. I also added two research libraries and an encyclopaedia link. Major sections include 'Sexual Health' and 'Drugs and Alcohol'.

I sent out the prototype to everyone I know and many others, and while I was waiting for feedback, I set up www.senioryears.com.au, a website which includes information on most topics people might have an interest in, from fun to finances, when heading for retirement.

By the way, if you look carefully in the 'Activities – Indoor' section you will find dancing. Hence the title, 'Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll' — it's all there and much, much more.

You can contact Loretta and provide her with feedback at her web sites:

www.healthinformation.com.au

www.senioryears.com.au

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Diet, promoted by Dr. Agatston's *The South Beach Diet: The Delicious, Doctor-Designed, Foolproof Plan for Fast and Health Weight Loss*, seized the limelight, with its suggestions to eliminate bad carbohydrates such as those in highly processed foods and soft drinks.

Unfortunately, there appears to be no evidence that diet books actually help people lose weight over the long run unless combined with an in-person treatment program (Womble, Wong, & Wadden, 2002). While it is easy to read a book, it is hard to make the lifelong changes in calorie intake and calorie burn-up essential to losing weight and not regaining it. In this regard, in-person psychological treatments for obesity tend to produce long-term benefits (beyond

one year) of only one or two kilograms of weight loss (Norris et al., 2004).

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