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TAC consumer complaint against advertisement for quack treatment for HIV/AIDS upheld by Advertising Standards Authority

By *moderator*

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The Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa (ASASA) has upheld a complaint by the Treatment Action Campaign against an advertisement for fraudulent treatment for HIV which appeared in the *Sowetan* newspaper on 6



June 2008. [You can download a copy of ASASA's ruling here.](#)

The advert in question, placed by Gogo's Traditional Medicines (GTM), claimed *inter alia* that:

- ?finally we have managed to develop medicines for HIV that brings [sic] real improvement in your health.?
- GTM's Bantam Tonic, ?reduces viral load in your body and increases your CD4 count in less than 30 days? and,
- The company's Pisces Tonic, ?helps to fight other opportunistic sickness [sic].?

These products, marketed together as a package in five litre quantities, were advertised for sale ?for only? R1500.

None of the claims made about the therapeutic efficacy of GMTs products are substantiated and there is no evidence that either Bantam or Pisces Tonics have ever been registered with the Medicines Control Council or that their safety, quality and efficacy have ever been established. They are most likely untested, unproven and potentially dangerous substances marketed by GTM for the sole purpose of exploiting people living with HIV for profit.

On 4 August 2008, TAC lodged a consumer complaint with ASASA against GTM on the grounds that the *Sowetan*

advert from 6 June violated the ASASA's Code of Advertising Practice which expressly prohibits dishonest, unsubstantiated, misleading and false advertising. Appendix F of the Code also prohibits the advertisement of products, treatments or advice for certain illnesses, including HIV, unless the recommendations made in the advertisement, accord with a full product registration by the Medicines Control Council?.

[You can download a copy of TAC's complaint against Gogo's Traditional Medicines , with a copy of the Sowetan advert attached, here.](#)

Last week ASASA's Directorate upheld TAC's complaint. In its ruling, the Directorate ordered that:

- The advertisement must be withdrawn;
- The process to withdraw the advertisement must be actioned with immediate effect on receipt of the ruling;
- The withdrawal of the advertisement must be completed within the deadlines stipulated by Clause 15.3 of the Procedural Guide;
- The advertisement may not be used again in their [*sic*] current format until registered.

ASASA's ruling, as well as [Health Minister Barbara Hogan's recent speech to leading members of the HIV scientific community](#) in which she commended the [Cape High Court judgment against notorious AIDS denialist Matthias Rath and his quack cures for HIV/AIDS](#), should send a strong message to the many fakes and charlatans who continue to promote fraudulent treatments and cures for HIV/AIDS - that their illegal and unethical marketing activities will not be tolerated.

We salute ASASA for its speedy and effective action and would furthermore like to extend our thanks to the concerned member of the public who brought the advertisement to our attention.

For comment or to report false or misleading advertisements for fraudulent medicines, cures or treatments aimed at exploiting people living with HIV/AIDS please contact Andrew Warlick on 021-422-1700 or at andrew@tac.org.za

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