



Dear Dame Caroline and Mr Brine,

We are writing to you in your capacity as Chair of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee and Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee respectively, on behalf of the M.E. community, in light of an episode of the BBC's Dragon's Den which aired on 18 January 2024. The episode in question featured an entrepreneur who was seeking investment in her 'acu seed' business. Giselle Boxer told the Dragons that she had been diagnosed with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.) and that using this product alongside a combination of alternative medicines 'aided' her recovery within 12 months.

We are very concerned that the way in which her pitch was presented on Dragons Den suggests that this product was responsible for her recovery and should therefore be considered an effective treatment.

Sadly, there is currently no known effective treatment for M.E. There has been a distinct paucity of research into this disease, compared to other long-term conditions, which means that M.E. is still without a cure. As a result, we remind people to only take medical advice from appropriately qualified healthcare professionals and to ensure that any treatment decisions are evidence-based and fully informed.

As you may be aware, Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E.) is a long-term fluctuating illness that causes symptoms affecting many body systems, most commonly the nervous and immune systems. Symptoms of M.E. include debilitating pain, extreme sensitivity to noise and light, and persistent fatigue associated with post-exertional malaise; the body and brain's inability to recover after expending even small amounts of energy.

M.E. is not a new condition and whilst some people make good progress and may recover, many in our community will experience these symptoms for decades, with the most severely affected (around 1 in 4 people with M.E.) often unable to leave their house or bed.

According to the business's [website](#), acu seeds are "a needle-free form of auriculotherapy that have been used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) for thousands of years." The website claims the product "may support a broad spectrum of health concerns including anxiety, stress, headaches, digestion, immunity, and focus."

In her TV appearance, Giselle does not explicitly say that acu seeds cured her illness and whilst the website was updated the day after the episode's airing and now does not claim that acu seeds will cure M.E. or other illnesses, it previously stated that "through the use of acupuncture, Chinese herbs and ear seeds, Giselle is now fully recovered (from ME) and thriving!".

It is important that broadcasters make every effort to ensure that content is accurate and does not contain misleading and potentially dangerous information. Given the episode in question was aired during prime time on BBC One, we worry that a larger audience will have heard this pitch which amounts to an unfounded claim that this form of alternative medicine can cure M.E.

Additional concerns have been raised in relation to a [blog post](#), promoted on a government website on 18 January, which details Giselle's appearance on the Dragons Den and features a heading "Seeds that heal".

In the age of social media and disinformation, we tend to trust major broadcasters like the BBC and .gov.uk sites to provide us with factual and reliable content. In this case, we believe they have fallen short of these expectations.

This speaks to a larger problem in our society. The internet offers an infinite number of sources at our fingertips, but we face difficulties trying to moderate these. People can access information from untrustworthy and potentially unsafe sources which can have serious consequences. We know that the first thing someone does when they are unwell or have a pain is search their symptoms online where thousands of search results await them. Similarly, social media has become an increasingly common source of health information with limited moderation.

This episode of Dragons Den demonstrates how misleading information can make its way to even the most trusted forms of media. We feel it is important, in your roles as Chairs of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee and the Health and Social Care Committee respectively, to investigate the role of media in promoting unfounded health claims and the impact this has on our health and safety.

We would be delighted to meet with you to discuss this matter further and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Action for M.E.

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