

## QUACKS SCRIPT

Welcome to **CAPETOWN** – the seat of a government that for many years confused it's people about the best ways for treating HIV. Vitamins, olive oil, lemon and beetroot, and a myriad of traditional therapies were promoted over scientifically proven life-prolonging anti-retroviral treatment. Today it's a city where snake-oil salesmen and voodoo scientists openly promise cures for anything from bad luck to AIDS. You don't even have to LOOK for the advertisers, they find YOU.

**QUACK ALERT** *(unless we can find a better name)*

NATHAN: A quack is someone who sells medicines, which haven't been tested. They couch what they're doing in a language which sounds scientific... they'll say that **THIS IS A PROVEN IMMUNE BOOSTER – TESTED AND SHOWN TO WORK**...when in actual fact when you investigate their claims properly no such testing has occurred.

**We have laws against it. But the laws don't work and after years of neglect and confusing messages from government, quacks in this country are able to get away with murder. Reporter Dimakatso Raphoto wanted to know what they're on about.**

DIMI ON THE PHONE: Dr Mama, you're speaking to Dimi...I've been collecting a lot of pamphlets and I'd like to come and see you in connection with the treatment that you give people.

**Over the next hour, Dr Mama keeps re-directing us to different buildings, dropping our phonecalls and forgetting who we are. So do all the other doctors we call. A number of pamphlets list the same address on the corner of Darling and Plein Streets. We ask the landlord to let us in and walk around without appointment.**

LINK DIMI WALKING THROUGH BUILDING AND POINTING AT DOCTORS ROOMS: So many people come and see traditional doctors and from the incense, the smell of the herbs you can actually believe whatever they tell you because their claim to fame is to cure diseases and heal people – but my question is...are these people real doctors or just quacks?

**While at the building, we meet a man we'll call "Kingsley". He said he paid a doctor there R4,000 to rid his house of evil spirits and give him peace. But the doctor kept asking for more money to solve the problem. While we drive around Cape Town, Kingsley, who now fears for his life, tells us how the doctor needed fourteen litres of Lion's blood.**

KINGSLEY (SUBTITLED): My wife and I discussed this and decided to take R70,000 from our bond. I gave them the money. He then came back to me and told me that the blood cost has now gone up to R14,000 a litre, which meant that it was then R98,000. I then went back to the bond, took out R28,000 and gave it to him.

**In total, Kingsley lost over R200,000. He's laid charges of fraud. Other offices in the building house dressmakers and hairdressers...and they know exactly what the doctors are up to.**

UPS SECURITY GUARD: I work in that building. I know what is going on. There are more than 20...

DIMI TRANSLATES SOME OF THIS ON CAMERA: They do abortions and what he's observed is one of the patients will see the same doctor and after they've taken more than R50,000 or whatever amount of money but it's thousands of rands, they disappear to the next town, either Belville or Goodwood or change their names from for example, Dr Mama to Dr Musa.

**One of the best pamphlets in our Dr Mama collection leads us to this building in Long Street. In addition to protecting you from evil spirits and helping you win at the casino, this is the home of Ozone Rectal Therapy. We bring with us seasoned HIV activist, Nathan Geffen who's busy writing a book on quacks, to help us decipher what we're about to be sold. At first it doesn't look anything like the other Dr Mamas.**

ABRIE VLOK (SUBTITLED): Ek het 'n vriend gehad wat HIV positief was en hy't rondgespeel met kruie-ekstrakte en olies...met al die gespelery – hy was gelink gewees met 'n universiteit in SA – dit was die Space Technology unit van die universiteit...toe vra die universiteit hulle wil 'n bydrae lewer...Mark Shuttleworth...en hulle het toe 'n ozonator ontwikkel...

**Mr Vlok's story sounds a lot like science fiction – complete with space travel and a miraculous creation that can invade HIV cells in the body and spectacularly explode them from inside. Something no scientist has been able to do.**

ABRIE VLOK (SUBTITLED): Hierdie witsel se rant val hy...sodra hy dit gedoen het, penetreer hy die virus.

**But this is no friendly fairytale. Ozone has NEVER been tested as treatment for HIV. Vlok admits they're not registered with our Medicines Control Council, even though he's treated friends and family. Ozone may have a bright future for medical use, but it's still in experimental phase. Vlok has been banned from using this technology, by the scientists who ARE trying to develop it for commercialisation. They're even trying to interdict him from spreading his ideas.**

VLOK (SUBTITLED): Mense wat HIV AIDS is...positief, hulle besef dis hul laaste kans, hulle sal betaal wat hulle...dis hulle lewe.

**Vlok's business partner is Dr Saibu from West Africa. Vlok claims that without registration in THIS country, they're focusing on getting the treatment into East Africa and he's visiting Uganda this month.**

**ADBREAK**

**From the city to the Cape Flats, quack cures and quick fixes are everywhere. You'll stumble across it, hear some larger-than-life testimonial, and stake all your hopes – and money – on the promise of a miracle. That's exactly what Andile Makondile did.**

ANDILE MAKONDILE: When I found out I am HIV positive, the first thing I went to is a traditional healer. I met this guy from Malawi...he told me that he can cure HIV and AIDS...you see...I went there...hey he gave me 5 litres of medicine...traditional medicine to drink and vomiting and GIVE ME SYRINGES...I think I stayed there round about a month...but I didn't see any improvement.

**By the time Andile sought hospital treatment, he was at deaths' door. But on anti-retrovirals his life is back to normal. He now works for the Treatment Action Campaign, to educate his community.**

**Just outside his office in Khayelitsha is where his job begins. There's a pension pay-out point. With poor people, desperate for help, and willing to pay whatever they have, the muti trade is brisk. Andile introduces us to one of the most eye-catching products.**

ANDILE MAKONDILE: One of my friends, who's staying in my area, who was taking ARVs, he dropped ARVs because of he take this thing...he buy this thing...after he stop his treatment, then he take Aloe Extra, he passed away in three months.

**Aloe Extra is produced by Natures Health – a familiar brand countrywide. At first, we found it hard to imagine that any company would knowingly promote aloe as a treatment for HIV. Maybe, we thought, people out there were just doing their own thing...So Dimi asked them what to do if she had HIV.**

DIMI: I can use Aloe Gel...and I will regain my weight. In the meantime, they gave this pamphlet...for someone who feels weak, who's CD4 count has dropped.

**It's no mistake that these products are being promoted for HIV. Colin Katz is the man behind Natures Health. It started very small, just him and his wife in their garden cottage. Within 9 years it grew to a multi-million rand countrywide network marketing empire.**

COLIN KATZ: We spoke to a lot of people – some were university professors, scientists ...we also spoke to a very well-known traditional healer, a Dr Credo Mutwa who told us what he used and it was really from all of that information that we started developing certain products and then developed the business from that – but our focus was very much on natural remedies for HIV/AIDS.

HARRIS: let's say you've got AIDS – by the time you reach...go down and

down and you start realising it's the product is not working for you, you might reach a health professional, who's not able to institute medication in time to repair the damage that's been done and it could be too late.

**From this laboratory, Dr Harris Steinman has taken on the producers of health products for years about making unsubstantiated claims for their products. They test products themselves and know how often alternative health practitioners get away with bad science because as consumers we don't check what we buy.**

HARRIS: There's no studies that show that aloe works...aloe extract itself can be toxic – so is there any proof that this aloe extract or any aloe extract does not cause toxicity? We know that aloe extract can actually affect the kidneys...damage it irreversibly...causing quite a severe nephritis...so this could go from having no effect at all, to being quite toxic. We don't actually know.

**We asked Nature's Health for scientific studies proving that THEIR products work. We never got any. Not two WEEKS after our interview, the company was liquidated, leaving us without the promised research, and leaving their thousands of distributors out there, none the wiser about the products.**

**It cast the wide availability of its products in a whole new – and, we think, sinister light. We took Nathan Geffen shopping in Cape Town – at major discount chain-store, Discom, who sold us a range of immune boosters.**

NATHAN GEFFEN ON THE STREET: You've got this one which claims it assists in strengthening the immune system...which is obviously code for AIDS.

DIMI ON THE STREET: This one says relieves the following symptoms: Tiredness, HIV, mouth sores, arthritis, skin rash, diarrhea, warts, TB, loss of appetite, flu, fluctuation in weight...this is Ingwe Boost.

NATHAN GEFFEN ON THE STREET: Can I just tell you something about this?! If there's one product that's been shown to be not only useless, but dangerous, it's African potato – there was a study done of African potato in people with HIV. And in fact the group that took the African potato did worse than the group who were placebo.

NATHAN: Quackery occurs everywhere in every society, but usually it occurs at the margins of society...and the reason why quackery has become mainstream in SA is because quacks have received the political support of the minister of health, the previous Minister of Health – Manto Tshabalala-Msimang...and the previous president, Thabo Mbeki and it started off in the mid-90s when the president started to support a quack remedy called VIRODENE as a treatment for AIDS...

For years, Mbeki's regime dragged its feet on proven anti-retroviral treatment, in favour of quack remedies, from Nurse Tine van der Maas' garlic, lemons and beetroot to vitamin salesman Matthias Rath's illegal trials on AIDS patients. And who can forget Ubhejane, a remedy that truck driver Zeblon Gwala concocted in his dreams.

### **ADBREAK**

Next stop on OUR journey is Johannesburg, where we find CERAGEM. Ceragem is a South Korean invention – a massage bed that claims to align the spine and improve blood circulation.

The American Food and Drug Administration registered it for the treatment of stiffness, minor muscle aches and joint pains, and a temporary increase in local circulation. Morokane Choma owns this outlet.

MOROKANE: Let's say someone comes with a low CD4 count and everything...now after experiencing the effectiveness of CERAGEM, they go back to their doctors and they the doctors write them notes and say, wow – you are now alive because your CD4 count is up – it's no more longer here (shows low)...that means CERAGEM gave that infrared and circulated the blood, unblocking the nerves and everything...so that is how we operate yes (KEEP SHOT TO FURTIVE GLANCE AT BOSSES)

**His salespitch includes the story of someone who recovered miraculously within months.**

MANAGER MR CHOMA IN EVANGELICAL MODE DOING SALESPITCH TO BIG AUDIENCE: Their immune system were very low Their CD4 count were very low. They were just about to take the ARVs. Halala Ceragem Halala! Halala Ceragem Halala! In fact what I'm saying, they were just about to go to the grave. They were waiting just behind that pillar, everyday they were sleeping...halala Ceragem!! I didn't run away from them...I kept giving them hope and the spirit of saying they will be healed...one day...three months, four months, five months coming to CERAGEM...they got up and told me, Brother Choma, it's going well! (APPLAUSE)

**In 2005, the Attorney General of Texas banned Ceragem in his state for making inflated claims, like being able to cure cancer, epilepsy, obesity and heart disease. But this wasn't the even strangest turn on our journey into quack land.**

DIMI INTRO WALKING INTO HOTEL: One of the weirdest claims we we've heard is from professor Victor Ngu from Cameroun who claims he can make an HIV vaccine from your own infected blood. By coincidence he's here in Durban to receive a prestigious award. We're going to his hotel room and hear what he has to say...

**Prof Ngu's story shows just how easy it is for even science to get it**

**wrong. He was trained at some of the best medical schools in the world. He was even the Minister of Health of his country at one time.**

PROF VICTOR ANOMAH NGU: The making of it is a trade secret so that others like Prof Salim don't make it themselves.

**We asked eminent South African vaccine scientist Prof Salim Abdool-Karim to help interview and interpret Professor Ngu's so-called vaccine**

PROF SALIM ABDOOL-KARIM: So let me understand you correctly. So you have produced a therapeutic vaccine, which is an autologous component virus... in other words, you take the whole virus from somebody...you treat it in a way in which you produce a sub-unit, that sub-unit you claim to be the core without the envelope...you then inject that core back into somebody – and you claim that that core then creates antibodies that can clear the virus?

PROF VICTOR NGU: Yes...

PROF SALIM ABDOOL-KARIM: So I've understood you correctly?

PROF VICTOR NGU: It has to be done in such a way that the envelope of the virus in the patient is destroyed in the process...

**Prof Ngu claims he has prevented 23 HIV positive people from progressing to AIDS, in effect curing them from getting AIDS. None of this has been proven independently. And of course his treatment doesn't come for free.**

PROF NGU: Most people – if I may use you as an example, if I may say so – don't believe in it, they're think we're talking out of our heads...

PROF SALIM ABDOOL-KARIM: I must say I found his take on his therapeutic vaccine to be well-intended by unfortunately really misdirected and I think is something that we have to ensure that NEVER occurs in South Africa in patients should be aware and know that we have proven treatments that we know work, that are available for free...and can save lives...

NATHAN: there are laws that protect the public and it is illegal to sell a medicine that isn't registered with the Medicines Control Council for the treatment of HIV, for diabetes, for cancer...for a whole range of important illnesses. And what we need to see is a few quacks being prosecuted and I think that will then bring the situation a bit more under control.

PROF NCEBA GQALENI: There's no well-meaning traditional healer...I'm not talking of a charlatan...or someone who's a chance-taker...but there's no well-meaning, deeply committed healer who will deliberately and knowingly give you a product that they know is going to harm your health.

**Prof Nceba Gqaleni works closely with REAL traditional healers to teach them about HIV and ARVS, while learning**

**about their muti. The idea is to find the best possible care for patients as soon as possible. Russel Wightman himself had to weigh these alternatives when he was offered a traditional remedy.**

RUSSEL WIGHTMAN: The person who gave it to me didn't change me, so it wasn't a money-making scheme. At all. It was more to help me...and maybe the world...I was very hopeful that it would work...there was a spring in my step...even though I was actually quite sick – because my CD4 count was below 200, which is considered full-blown AIDS.

**Russel delayed going onto ARVS in order to try the traditional medicine. He has no regrets. He wants to try it again once he's stronger.**

RUSSEL WIGHTMAN: It didn't pull me out of...my CD4 keeping on plummeting...and I spoke to my doctors who are also my friends as well and they were saying that any alternative treatment wouldn't have worked at that point. Because my CD4 count was so low. My body was fighting so crazily, just to stay alive, these other treatments wasn't even registering...wasn't recognising them. So now...the ARVS have SAVED ME!

**Most plants have some anti-viral properties. But to get the right dose to kill HIV, you'd have to take huge quantities, which are impossible to ingest, and unaffordable. Dr Dave Walwyn has even built a business on looking for that magic plant ingredient. After millions of rands worth of testing, the results are still disappointing.**

DR DAVE WALWYN, ARVIR: We have no clinical evidence whatsoever of any product, a herbal product or a allopathic medicine which can eradicate the virus. So this virus has defeated us in all of the treatments that have been tested clinically.

**So if you can't cure HIV, what about those "immune boosters" people believe help you stay strong? Dr Walwyn fears it may have completely the opposite effect.**

DR DAVE WALWYN, ARVIR: I have a lot of problems with the claims that are made around immune boosters...the reason is very simple – HIV is a disease of the immune system, and the targets are cells of the immune system, so the logic is really very simple. If you boost the immune system, you boost the number of targets that the HIV can infect and therefore you boost the production of viral particles.

PROF NCEBA GQALENI: You've got to be smart...we've got not to be gullible...someone sells you something, you've got to take your time...don't be quick to make decisions, about your money, about your children, about your life!

**NOTES:**

The annual trade in raw medicinal plants is valued at R520m  
THP prescribe Traditional Medicine worth R2.6bn per year  
annual sales of herbal medicines is worth R588m  
total contribution of Traditional Medicine to be more than R3bn.  
services of approximately 200,000 THPs makes it the biggest health  
service  
industry in the country.