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By Pamela Fayerman
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Spring is finally here and many of us don't need to know the temperature to tell us that. Our repetitive sneezing and drippy noses from hay fever symptoms are ample evidence.

I've been allergic practically my whole life to the tree pollens that are now airborne. For many years, I got weekly allergy shots but twice, I had bad reactions at the top dose level. So I gave up on allergy shots (inconvenient as well, to say the least) and went to a medical doctor who practises homeopathic allergy medicine. I got from him some serum containing the offending allergens in tiny doses. I put a few drops under my tongue each day – about a month or two before the onset of tree pollination season - and that's how I achieved desensitization. I was allergy symptom free for about three years.

I've missed the boat for this year's allergy season but I will plan to take that course again early in 2010 so I don't have to depend on antihistamine pills.

All of this is background to my intrigue over a recent press release announcing a "new" allergy treatment which was billed as the "First sublingual immunotherapy treatment in Canada." [Click here to read it.](#)

The public relations company which sent out the release, Hill and Knowlton, made it sound as though there's some revolutionary treatment now available.

It's important in my job to be skeptical and recognize hyperbole when you see it so I suggested to the PR agent this may not be true, citing my own experience.

In an email, she replied:

"Hi Pamela,

I have spoken with Dan Sharp, CEO of Western Allergy about your experience and he explained that in the past there may have been a few allergists who were using traditional allergy treatments 'off-label' and providing them as drops for patients, but they are very rare.

Pollenguard is the first commercially available sublingual treatment in Canada and it is produced by Western Allergy who have been working in allergy treatments for over 35 years, based in Victoria. "

I can't discern the subtle distinctions here. Sublingual (oral drops) treatment isn't common, nor well known in Canada, but it's certainly not new. In Europe, it has been around (and well researched) for decades. It is indeed the preferred approach there, not only because patients will do anything to avoid needles, but also because sublingual treatment requires far fewer visits to the doctors office. Indeed, you can say that one of the reasons

why North American doctors have not embraced this approach is because they have an economic interest in giving allergy shots since they receive a fee every time they (or their nurse) give the shot.

When you get oral drops, there is a fee for the first visit and then a fee for the oral drops, neither of which is covered by the public medical insurance plan since it is not conventional treatment. Imagine how much money the public system and the provincial government could save if allergy shots were replaced by this alternative approach. Of course patients have out of pocket expenses up front, but those are offset by savings on antihistamines.

Finally, lest anyone think this is snake oil treatment, the Cochrane Review and the World Health Organization have examined the studies that have been done on sublingual immunotherapy and concluded it is a safe and effective approach for allergies triggered by pollens and dust.

For people who are anticipating summer hay fever due to allergies to grasses, for example, now is the time to think about starting oral desensitization therapy.

[For more information about Pollenguard, click here.](#)