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It is one of the fastest-growing industries and a reflection of our obsession with keeping the end at bay. Yesterday, delegates from all over the world gathered at London's first anti-ageing conference to discuss ways of slowing the ravages of time.

They talked about understanding the quantum mechanics of ageing, of testosterone deficits in men and a "strategy for rejuvenation of human skin using closed telomere sequences".

And on display were products from manufacturers with names like Longevity Plus, Inner Age and Rejuvenal. Paying £250 at the door of Kensington town hall in west London, the delegates came to learn how science, diet and potions and lotions can all be used to get a younger, healthier, sexier you.

Therapy

The Anti-Ageing Conference London comes in the same week that a Cambridge academic announced that new treatments would soon help people live until they were at least 120 and up to the more incredible 5,000.

Dr Aubrey de Grey predicted that "rejuvenation processes" will be widely available by 2030, and predicts scientific leaps could eventually let people live for ever. He said a gene and stem cell therapy, as well as vaccinations to reprogramme the body's immune system, would halt ageing within 25 years. Opening the conference, Robert Goldman, "a supreme athlete with over 20 world strength records including a record 13,500 consecutive sit-ups", gave an address titled: Better, Stronger, Faster - Human Enhancement and Augmentation: Advances via Biotechnology and Anti-ageing.

Dr Goldman (a doctor of philosophy, not medicine)(*Side Note: Robert Goldman, MD, PhD, FAASP, DO, FAOASM refutes this statement and is taking up legal action against the Guardian newspaper*), who says he is as fit and young as he was in his 20s but would only admit to being in his late 40s, was somewhat hurt when it was pointed out that he does indeed look his age. "It's the inside that matters," he said. The UK, he said, had the potential for "significant growth".

This new science of anti-ageing, he admitted, was causing consternation and had been roundly condemned by many in the medical and biotechnology fields. "It's controversial because we are always going to have people who find it difficult to accept new technology. They say 'We don't know if it's going to help, we shall have to wait 20 or 30 years to see,' but if we waited that long we wouldn't do anything.

"Within the community we have some people that are resistant and some who are not. Scientists don't like the term anti-ageing because it is not their term - we came up with the term in the early 1990s. There is a difference of opinion as to how quickly the science will move ahead."

Dr Goldman and fellow keynote speaker Ronald Klatz, chairman and founding president respectively of the American Academy of Anti-Ageing Medicine, were fined \$5,000 (£2,750) by the state of Illinois and agreed to stop calling themselves doctors because their degrees came from the Central America Health Sciences University School of Medicine in Belize, according to the Quackwatch website.(*Side Note: Goldman and Klatz refute this statement and are taking up legal action against the Guardian newspaper*)

Dr Goldman denied that he and his fellow delegates were "selling hope". He said: "This is not some magic elixir, some magic pill or salve ... it is based on science. It is a detailed scientific approach like in sports."

Warning

In his speech, he forecast that genetic engineering, cloning and miniaturisation of drugs will be part of developments to aid the anti-ageing process. Synthetic skin, artificial muscles, the internet and artificial intelligence are all hi-tech developments which are helping to improve the quality of life, and, given time, extend life spans, he claimed.

But Dr de Grey will warn them, in his speech today, that they may have misused the term anti-ageing. He said that physicians and suppliers of anti-ageing medicine were selling things that were perfectly legitimate within their own scope but the use of the phrase gave the impression that it could do more.

He was working on an anti-ageing medicine that didn't exist but had a chance of existing, "a biomedical technology that actually extends lifespan". He agreed that most of his colleagues in academia and science "distance themselves from this sort of thing".

But it was "mainly a technical conference, it's certainly not all snake oil though some of it probably is". He said: "Certainly, in a lot of these meetings there are a number of products being sold that have no merit whatsoever."

The conference used a butterfly as its emblem: an unfortunate choice since a butterfly has a very short lifespan.(*Side Note: Actually the Conference emblem is a Caduceus - the medical symbol - wings of a bird atop a short rod entwined by 2 snakes.*) On spotting the butterfly, Brigitte Nielsen, the Danish-born model who addressed a gala dinner last night, promptly unzipped her skirt to reveal her new butterfly tattoo, adorned with the word "Mattia", the name of her boyfriend of four months.

No time

The conference blurb said the sometime actress would talk about her "healthy lifestyle, including her nutritional secrets and exercise regime". But she admitted that her work schedule meant her eating habits were all to pot and with four children she just didn't have time.

The first thing she would have to do, she said, was give up smoking. She had come because "my boyfriend is 26 years old and I need to keep up".

The 41-year-old said: "I am here to pick up some suggestions on how to eat well and stay healthy because I am not very good at that."

After a quick photocall, the statuesque Ms Nielsen left the conference, probably for a fag. So far, so healthy.

Turning back time

• Inner-Age

Claims: To help you age successfully.

How: Uses physical, blood and urine tests to determine biological age then lifestyle change and supplements to reduce signs of ageing.

•Pharmanex

Claims: To raise antioxidant levels by supplementing diet with pills to combat free radical damage.

How: By using a BioPhotonic Scanner to reveal carotenoid antioxidant levels. Promises improved skin within 60 days or your money back.