

Reese launches plus-size clothing line

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES—Della Reese is tired of boring clothes for larger women. So the plus-size actress has started her own clothing line. "It's very difficult for me to find anything with shape or color ... some oomph," said

Reese, who described herself as 5 feet 2 inches tall and 200 pounds.

Reese, 74, has designed her own vividly hued outfits for years. Her line, Della Reese Fashions, will debut April 4 on the Home Shopping Network.

"I want to give women the opportunity to have some pizzazz also," said Reese, who starred in TV's "Touched by an Angel."

Her line of cocktail, office and casual wear will feature a range of colors. "I like bright yellows,

oranges, reds I like purple and pink, not just purple and purple and purple," she said.

Reese is also an activist against diabetes and a church pastor. Four months ago, she received a doctorate in divinity from the University of Metaphysics in Arizona.

Hormone injection comes with risks

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CHICAGO—Injecting himself with human growth hormone six times a week and swallowing a handful of dietary supplements each day doesn't seem weird or excessive to 44-year-old Richard Weisman of Las Vegas.

"I have young children. I do it for them," said Weisman, the owner of a luxury and sports car dealership at Caesar's Palace. "I want to be healthy as I get older."

Not only that, he said, he also feels an increase in energy, muscle mass and libido. "My wife loves it and is going to start the program herself," he said.

Weisman isn't alone. Other ordinary non-athletic Americans are injecting themselves with human growth hormone as part of a regimen prescribed by fringe doctors and a multimillion-dollar anti-aging industry that—depending on who's talking—is either solidly based on science or mostly hucksterism and quackery.

Much of anti-aging medicine, or as it's more often called in recent years "age-management" medicine, relies on dietary supplements, nutrition counseling and exercise programs.

But a portion of patients also get blood tests that detect supposedly low levels of a marker for human growth hormone. Those patients often go home with a prescription for injectable HGH and a \$500 monthly hormone bill that insurance doesn't touch.

Human growth hormone is produced naturally by the pituitary gland and contributes to normal growth in children. In studies, HGH has been shown to increase muscle mass and reduce fat in men and women, with notable side effects, including diabetes.

A pharmaceutical version is approved for treating children who fail to grow for various reasons, for AIDS patients with muscle wasting syndrome and for adults with legitimate growth hormone deficiency caused, for example, by surgery or radiation.

Other uses are illegal, including to turn back the clock on aging. The FDA says it is investigating violations of the law—the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act as amended in 1988 and 1990—and has sent warning letters to companies selling HGH over the Internet for other uses.

Olshansky, who co-authored a paper published last year in the Journal of the American Medical Association on legal issues surrounding HGH, said anti-aging doctors were surprised to learn they were on shaky legal ground.

They now are changing tactics by redefining growth hormone deficiency and making questionable diagnoses of their patients, Olshansky said.

"They've been administering growth hormone as an anti-aging intervention for a long time. They haven't been hiding it at all," Olshansky said. "Now they're trying to redefine it as a treatment for growth hormone deficiency."

Most prescriptions for HGH should go to children, according to Dr. Thomas Perls of Boston Medical Center, but 74 percent in 2004 went to people age 20 and older.

"In my opinion, that suggests a large amount of illegal distribution," said Perls, a co-author with Olshansky of the JAMA paper and director of a project that studies people who live to age 100.

Sales of HGH in 2004 totaled \$622 million for legitimate and non-legitimate uses.

Weisman, the Las Vegas car dealer, said he pays \$1,000 a month for supplements and hormones, and a twice-yearly blood test costs him \$650 each time.

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