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Press Release

Regulator's response to inaccurate reports on proposed CAM Council

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In the interests of clarity the General Regulatory Council for Complementary Therapies (GRCCT) would like to join the General Osteopathic Council in correcting articles in The Times, The Daily Mail and The Daily Telegraph published on the 5th January 2008 in relation to the proposed Natural Healthcare Council regulatory scheme.

New laws to govern alternative medicine There is NO NEW Law – this is a proposed voluntary register

Aromatherapy, homoeopathy and other popular complementary therapies are to be regulated for the first time under a government-backed scheme to be established this year.

There is already a regulator –The General Regulatory Council for Complementary Therapies (GRCCT) which the industry set up in 2007 when three of the largest therapy groups were excluded from the Foundation's development process, because they couldn't agree with the bureaucracy of the proposed council.

The new Natural Healthcare Council – which is being backed by the Prince of Wales – will be able to strike off errant or incompetent practitioners. It will also set minimum standards for practitioners to ensure that therapists are properly qualified.

ANY register can strike off registrants.

The therapy groups set the standards, a regulator administers them. And the therapy groups which represent the largest groups are not supporting this new register

As an independent regulator the backing or otherwise of the Prince of Wales should not be relevant

Patients will be able to complain to the council about practitioners and the new body will be modelled on the General Medical Council and other similar statutory bodies.

This proposed register bears little resemblance to the GMC. The GMC is a statutory body, with powers enforceable under law. The GMC council is composed of members elected by the medical practitioners, members appointed by the Queen on advice of Privy Council, and members appointed by Universities and Medical Colleges throughout the UK. This new register is composed of 8 lay members with three 'representatives' of CAM therapy. The 'representatives' are not entitled to vote.

Millions of Britons currently spend £130 million a year on complementary treatments and it is estimated that this will reach £200 million over the next four years. Among the practices to be covered by the scheme would be aromatherapy, reflexology, massage, nutrition, shiatsu, reiki, naturopathy, yoga, homoeopathy, cranial osteopathy and the Alexander and Bowen techniques.

Again it should be emphasised that the therapies with almost 50% of the practitioners on which the public spend their £130 million have stated that they will NOT be supporting this process.

Research also shows that more than two thirds (68 per cent) of people in the UK believe that complementary medicine is as valid as conventional treatment.

However, there have been long-standing concerns over its regulation. At present anyone can set themselves up as an acupuncturist, homoeopath, herbalist, or other complementary therapist. However, a poll for The Times found that three quarters of people assumed that anyone practising complementary therapy is trained and registered by a professional body.

The GRCCT would agree with this part of the statement. It is imperative that the public, the medical profession and the NHS are able to check the validity of a therapists claimed qualification with a one-stop process and for them to be reassured by a robust complaints procedure. We thank the Foundation for contributing to an ongoing campaign to raise awareness.

Although the scheme will initially be voluntary, it is hoped that all practitioners will be forced to join or lose business as the public will use the register as a guarantee of quality. The council will register only practitioners who are safe, have completed a recognised course, are insured and have signed up to codes of conduct.

Both alternative and complementary approaches to medicine — when a therapy is used as an alternative to conventional medicine and when it is used in conjunction with it — will be covered by the new regulator, although treatment without consideration of mainstream medicine is likely to come under greater scrutiny.

This is a very strange statement. It would seem to imply that some of the therapies covered by this proposed new register do not have appropriate Codes of Conduct.

A number of high-profile cases in which therapists have assaulted clients have reached the courts in recent years. In 2000, a man claiming to be an aromatherapist was spared a jail sentence after being convicted of indecently assaulting a woman who came to him to treatment. An osteopath from Ipswich was jailed last February for seven and a half years after a series of sexual assaults.

Osteopaths are statutorily regulated; it is a criminal offence for an unregistered individual to practice Osteopathy in the UK. Osteopaths have not connection to this proposed register and will not be listed on it. The General Osteopathic Council have issued their own statement in this regard entitled [GOsC responds to inaccurate reports on National Healthcare Council](#)

But as the law stands, there is nothing to prevent such people setting up in practice again. By checking that they remain registered with the new council, patients will gain reassurance.

Without the support of the largest therapy groups – who have stated they will not be supporting this register - it is very difficult to understand how the public can have any confidence or be protected.

Only mainstream alternative therapies such as traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture are to be the subject of statutory regulation. Osteopathy and chiropractic are already covered by such legislation.

The council, whose formation has been driven by the Prince of Wales's Foundation for Integrated Health, will consist of lay people appointed through an independent process, with a clear division between it and the professional bodies representing the therapies that it will cover.

Use of words such as 'driven' and 'forced' in this statement are indicative of the manner in which this process has been conducted. The major therapies objected to the complexity and costs of the proposed process were informed not to send their representatives to any further development meetings.

The 'appointment through an independent process' has been revealed to be questionable after the current Chair of the International Federation of Professional Aromatherapists (IFPA), Sue Jenkins, confirmed in a statement sent to all members, that the Foundation was to by-pass any independent selection process:

'We are assured by the FIH (*Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health*) that we will be able to nominate members of the IFPA to sit on the profession specific board (PSB) and the professional advisory panel (PAP) of the FWG (*Federal Working Group- NHC development body*), even if we (the IFPA) choose to join neither the GRCCT, nor the new aromatherapy body.'

Mr Ian Cambray-Smith, the Prince's Foundation Programme Manager is the ex-Chair and co-creator of IFPA. He attended the IFPA conference in 2007 as an honorary member.

It is further understood that some of the Lay Chairs of the Therapy Groups, initially recruited by the Prince's Foundation have already been offered roles on the Natural Healthcare Council (NHC).

The work of setting up the council, which is likely to be finished by the spring, led by Dame Joan Higgins, has been funded by the Department of Health and it will follow the best-practice model set out by the department in its white paper on regulation, Trust, Assurance and Safety.

The professions existing Regulator the GRCCT fulfills all the criteria as defined in the Trust, Assurance and Safety White Paper.

Ian Cambray-Smith, of the Foundation, said: "Although it is a voluntary scheme, we believe that in dealing with misconduct by therapists it will be almost as robust as statutory regulation, and as tough as we can make it. Suspension from the register will be the ultimate sanction.

"It will be good for practitioners, good for patients, and even good for the NHS. If there is a complaint, the council will convene a board of lay people, plus two practitioners, to review the case. If it is proven, a second board will determine what disciplinary procedures to take."

The reality is that there are very few complaints against complementary therapists and suspension from this register will not prevent the therapist from being able to continue in practice as this is not protection of title as with statutory regulation.

The NHS spends £50 million a year on complementary therapies that will be covered by the new council.

The council - eight people plus a chairman — will be financed by registration fees from practitioners and will have a permanent staff, who are in the process of being recruited.

There are eight people on the 'top table' with a Lay Chair making nine and there are then twelve 'Profession Specific Boards' each with five members, there are four 'Council Boards' each with seven members and a 'Profession Advisory Panel' with twelve members. Before counting any administrative staff this proposed new regulator will seek to fund over 100 positions and has an estimated annual running cost in excess of £350,000

Having spent £2 million from the Kings Fund and the Department of Health the Prince's Foundation is now asking the Department of Health for a further £3 million of taxpayer's money to fund this new register in opposition to the professions own self-funding regulator.

Notes to Editors

The GRCCT is the only existing federal regulator for CAM in the UK and currently regulates the four largest therapy groups.

Three additional therapies are currently under consideration for admission to the GRCCT

Most of the groups named in the article have not agreed to support the proposed new register with some such as Osteopathy already covered by statutory regulation

In a Statement issued on January 8th Paula Ross, Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Homeopaths said:

'Whilst The Society welcomes the creation of a Natural Healthcare Council, it is greatly concerned at its proposed inclusion of homeopathy, notably without consultation since, as a profession, in 2006, homeopathy unanimously concluded that this voluntary register was not appropriate for its needs and the public who use it.'

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