

Letter to Royal College of Physicians about Integrated Health Committee from Michael McIntyre chair of EHTPA

Dear Professor Hodgson,

May I add my voice to the emails that have been written to you in advance of your meeting tomorrow to review the work of the RCP's Integrated Health Committee (IHC)?

I have been a member of the IHC, in its various incarnations, since 2001.

Throughout this time this Committee appears to me to have operated in an entirely constructive way, aiming to enable patients to make a safe choice when it comes to CAM treatments and as far as possible to ensure that CAM practice is integrated with conventional medicine. Throughout, I have been impressed at the thoughtful and positive way that the IHC has gone about its business. I understand that work by the IHC led the RCP to write in support of the statutory regulation of herbal medicine and acupuncture when the Department of Health previously consulted on this issue in 2004. The IHC minutes also show that the College sent a statement to the Minister supporting this regulation as recently as July 2008.

When the IHC recently discussed how the RCP might respond to the recent public consultation by the DH on the statutory regulation of herbal medicine and acupuncture, it once more did so in a considered and measured way and, as you know, advised the RCP Council that it was in the public interest that practitioners of these modalities should be statutorily regulated. This was with the proviso that herbalists and acupuncturists should commit to providing increasing levels of evidence according to Sackett's definition.^{[1][1]} This advice was in line with the stance taken by the RCP about the regulation of these practices over many years.

It was then a considerable surprise to learn that the RCP Council had followed the advice of its Ethics Committee (which, unlike the IHC, to the best of my

knowledge, had not hitherto been involved with this issue) and effectively rejected the notion of the statutory regulation of herbal medicine and acupuncture.

As I am sure you are aware, acupuncture and herbal medicine are extraordinarily popular forms of treatment. For example, recent research by Ipsos MORI for the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) found that more than a quarter of the population had bought herbal medicines over-the-counter in the previous two years, that one in twenty had consulted a practitioner of traditional Chinese Medicine and around one in twelve had consulted a practitioner of Western herbal medicine. This research noted that 77% of adults agree it is important that herbal medicines are regulated, with this figure rising to 87% among regular users of herbal medicines (defined as those who have used a herbal medicine within the last 2 years). Given this widespread use, the obvious point is that statutory regulation will ensure that those practising these modalities are properly trained and regulated which is both in the public interest and what the public wants. The idea that statutory regulation is a badge of rank is mistaken. The RCP's rejection of statutory regulation of herbal medicine and acupuncture serves only to run the risk of driving these modalities underground - allowing practitioners to remain unaccountable for what they do. This will deny patients the choice of what is in many instances an entirely valid option and also exposes the public the unnecessary and unwarranted risk.

I am truly sorry that years of work on the ICH should have come to this.

Yours sincerely,

Michael McIntyre