

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY!

SPEECH BY FRANK DOBSON, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH, TO THE CONFERENCE ON "INTEGRATED HEALTHCARE: A WAY FORWARD FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS"

**Q E II CONFERENCE CENTRE, LONDON
THURSDAY 28TH MAY 1998**

Today's conference is entitled "Integrated Healthcare: A Way Forward for the Next Five Years". It is the result of a joint effort by a number of distinguished practitioners and teachers of both orthodox and complementary medicine. That is an achievement in itself and I congratulate all those involved.

These days it is right and proper to declare one's interests at the beginning of a speech. I have a number to declare. My constituency of Holborn and St Pancras includes an unusually large number of hospitals and related research institutes. I am proud to try to represent them all, and that certainly includes the Royal London Homeopathic Hospital where much pioneering work in complementary and alternative medicine has been done. I also declare, perhaps confess would be a better word, that I am a pragmatist. I believe that what works is what counts and what counts is what works. With so many threats to our health we can't afford to ignore anything that works and is safe.

What is very clear is that orthodox medicine has worked wonders. New technology and new pharmaceutical products have made it possible to treat ailments which could not be treated in the past and to cure conditions which once were fatal. We may well be on the brink of huge breakthroughs which will save the lives of millions and transform the lives of tens of millions. I welcome that prospect and want to promote it.

But it's equally clear that some people with some conditions do not respond to even the most modern orthodox treatment. It's also clear that some of these people can be and are being helped by forms of complementary and alternative medicine. This fact is reflected in the survey by Sheffield University which showed that 40 per cent of GP practices in England were providing patients with access to complementary therapists.

As Secretary of State for Health it's my job to try to see that treatment offered to people in this country is both safe and effective. In parallel with the medical, nursing, midwifery and other professions, we are trying to raise clinical standards by promoting evidence based medicine.

More and more rigorous standards are being applied both to therapeutic practices and to the practitioners themselves. That's only right and proper. The same rigorous standards must be applied right across the board. And effective complementary and alternative therapies have nothing to fear from that.

People want treatment which is dependable whoever is providing it. They want to be sure that treatment is evidence based, that it works and that its safe. They also want to be able to have confidence in the professional skill and integrity of the practitioners of any therapy, orthodox or complementary.

The Report published last October by the Foundation for Integrated Medicine was the product of a great deal of rigorous work by the professionals involved. We welcomed that independent report.

The working parties who prepared the report covered four separate aspects:

- research and development;
- education and training;
- regulation;
- service delivery.

Let me spell out the Government's response to each.

Research & Development

The report emphasised the critical need to establish an evidence base for complementary and alternative medicine. The Department of Health is already making a contribution to this. The Health Technology Assessment Programme is currently commissioning research into acupuncture for the management of back pain in primary care. At the instigation of the HTA, the Medical Research Council are taking forward general work on complementary therapies in the treatment of back pain. Work is about to get underway into the effectiveness of different psychosocial interventions for patients and their families following cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Projects funded by NHS regions include assessments of acupuncture in recovery from strokes and for dealing with tension headaches. Studies have also been made of the effectiveness of a homeopathic remedy for asthma and of the benefits of massage. The Department has committed over £150,000 to two studies by the Medical Care Research Unit at Sheffield University. The first, into complementary therapies in primary care, is expected to report this summer.

The second, an evaluation of GP prescribing of osteopathy and chiropractice should be completed in September. These should provide valuable pointers for the new Primary Care Groups when they are established.

Professor Stephen Holgate and his colleagues on the R&D working group have met the Departments' Director of R&D, Professor John Swales. The Department will provide further advice to the Foundation to help establish sound processes for assessing research priorities. It seems to me crucial to demonstrate that complementary and alternative therapies have no need to shy away from rigorous scrutiny.

Education & Training

And the same applies to education and training. It would be difficult to over emphasise the importance of education and training to the future of complementary medicine. The report recognises this. Its proposals cover not only the education and training of complementary medicine practitioners themselves, but also the need for doctors, nurses and other orthodox practitioners to know more about complementary medicine: And of course anyone providing complementary medicine must be properly trained. The public at large and other health professionals must be able to have confidence that the programmes for education and training in complementary medicine produce practitioners fit to practise competently and safely within the scope of their particular therapy. It is not good enough simply to know how to apply a particular treatment. Practitioners must also know the contra-indications to treatment and be able to recognise if a patient is suffering from a condition which requires referral to a medical practitioner. For the safety of patients, all practitioners, whether complementary or orthodox, must be aware of their limits of clinical competence. The Foundation for Integrated Medicine has approached the relevant professional bodies about the report's proposals. I look forward to hearing about the progress of their discussions.

Regulation

And that brings me to regulation. People practising any form of medicine need to be regulated to protect the public and also to protect the reputation of the good practitioners. I believe that the only feasible system of regulation for the health care professions is self-regulation. But it must be rigorous self-regulation and involve a lay element. That applies to complementary and alternative practitioners as well as orthodox practitioners.

The Department of Health provided £25,000 to fund the survey of the professional organisation of complementary and alternative medicine carried out by the Centre for Complementary Health Studies at Exeter University.