



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Health Department
Public Health Division

Dear Colleague

COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

1. The Executive has been asked by the Health Committee to write to NHS Boards formally in order to clarify the position on the provision of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) through the NHS.

2. The Executive recognises, as successive UK Governments have for many years, that CAM may offer relief to some people suffering from a wide variety of conditions. There is no legislative bar to prevent practitioners from offering their services, apart from the restrictions placed by the Medicines Act on prescribing and supplying medicines and giving injections. Members of the public are free to use these services privately if they choose, and a GP or hospital clinician may refer a patient for alternative treatment. The GP or hospital clinician would require to be satisfied of the value of the treatment and the competence of the practitioner, and would remain responsible for the patient's medical care. Some GPs and other health professionals themselves are qualified in various forms of CAM. If an NHS Board sees a need for the provision of a particular type of CAM in its area it is open to that Board to provide that therapy, at the Board's discretion.

3. The majority of complementary disciplines are self-regulated, but osteopathy and chiropractic treatment are both subject to statutory regulation and the UK Health Departments recently conducted a consultation on whether acupuncture and herbal medicine should also be regulated by statute. There was a consensus of opinion that there should be a single regulatory council for both disciplines, and strong support for the proposition that there should be a single UK council rather than separate councils for Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Executive will work with the UK Government and the other devolved administrations to introduce legislation to establish such a council.

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Addresses

For action

Chief Executives, NHS Boards

For information

Chief Executives, Special Health Boards

Community Health Partnerships

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4. Recently the Executive made available to NHS Boards copies of a booklet produced by the Prince of Wales' Foundation for Integrated Health, *Complementary Healthcare - A Guide for Patients*. An electronic version is available at www.fihealth.org.uk

5. Complementary and Alternative Medicine is an area in which there is increasing public interest. Chief Executives are asked to take this into account in the planning of services. The Executive is aware that a number of NHS Boards already provide some forms of CAM.

Yours sincerely

PAM WHITTLE
DIRECTOR