

The Northern Ireland Association of Homeopaths

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The Editor

The Irish News

20 March 2009

Dear Sir

I would like to comment on Newton Emerson's ill-informed diatribe 'No Alternative to NHS's Fundamental Principles'. (Irish News 19.3.09)

As one of the practitioners who worked in the project I can see that, in his eagerness to rubbish complementary medicine, Newton has not actually read the 145-page report he is writing about.

First Newton tears into Prince of Wales as though he had improperly leant on the Department of Health to spend public money on a pet project. The Department did consult the Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health during the project, but in fact the project was conceived by our Minister of Health.

Then Newton complains that promotion of the project was "relentless and witless, culminating in an hour-long documentary which was indistinguishable from a corporate promotional video".

Yes, the BBC commissioned an award winning TV production company, Tern TV, to make a programme about a subject of interest to 70% of the population who would like to see complementary medicine made available through the health service. Isn't that what you would expect the BBC to do?

Nobody involved in the project had any control over the content of the programme. (My own lengthy interview was cut). Newton may not have liked its very positive portrayal of the of the project, showing chronically ill patients getting better as a result of complementary therapy treatments, but that doesn't mean, as he implies, that there was anything suspect about the way it was made.

Then Newton rips into the consultants who wrote the evaluation report. He said, "the report is based not on medical science but a customer survey".

In actual fact the research method was developed by doctors as a way of recording and tracking patients' symptoms and state of health before, during and after treatment. One of the strengths of the project was that this information was then checked by the referring GPs, who were able to comment on whether or not they agreed with the outcomes of our treatments.

Then in an attempt to explain away the large number of patients who got better, Newton writes that, "there was no attempt to determine the effect of one-to-one human contact." It is difficult to understand exactly what he means here. Presumably he was implying that the patients felt better because the therapists were nice to them. How insulting to the doctors who had previously done their utmost for these patients. And, considering that the GPs had oversight of the progress and outcomes of the treatments, how arrogant to suggest that they couldn't tell whether or not their patients were genuinely getting better.

But Newton is even more patronising and insulting to the patients themselves by trivialising their chronic illnesses. He writes, "almost everyone who survives a medical problem 'feels better' afterwards". Perhaps he means to imply that the patients would have got better without the treatments. Well, if he had actually read the report he would have seen that most of the patients were chronically ill - three quarters of them for over a year and nearly half of them for over five years. They had received conventional medical treatment during those years and they were not getting better, otherwise they wouldn't have been referred into the project. It is absolutely ludicrous to suggest that somehow they were all just about to get better.

Then Newton slags the Department of Health for "playing with the fundamental principles of healthcare". Surely it is a fundamental principle of healthcare to keep searching for appropriate and effective treatments, especially for those conditions for which conventional medicine has little or nothing to offer? Clearly, we provided successful outcomes for large numbers of patients for whom previously there had been none.

So according to Newton everyone is out of step but himself - the Minister and Department of Health, the BBC, the TV company, the project managers, the practitioners, the independent auditors, the GPs and several hundred patients.

I rather think it is Newton who is playing with the principles of healthcare by trotting out this litany of cheap, ill-conceived jibes.

Sadly, all along we knew that when the results were published there would be demonising attacks by ill-informed critics like Newton. It happens every time there is a positive story about complementary medicine. Readers may draw their own conclusions as to why that is so.

Patients ask me all the time: why can you and the doctors not work together to provide the best of all treatments? Well, for one year that is exactly what we did, and for the most part the patients and their doctors thought it was absolutely brilliant.

The report may be viewed and downloaded at the Department of Health website: http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/final_report_from_smr_on_the_cam_pilot_project_-_may_2008.pdf

I urge readers to read it for themselves, and then ask their doctors and their MLAs why these clinically effective, cost-efficient therapies are not being made available to them, the people who pay for the health service?

Yours sincerely

Ken Mayne RSHom

Chair

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Mr Michael McGimpsey MLA
Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety
Castle Buildings
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27 February 2009

Dear Mr McGimpsey

Independent Evaluation Report of the Integrated Medicine Pilot Programme 2007-2008

We warmly welcome the publication of this Report. We have appended a more detailed response, but in summary we can do no better than to quote the Report's key recommendation:

“Given the evidence of health gain documented by patients, GPs and CAM practitioners, it is recommended that DHSSPS and the project partners explore the potential for making CAM more widely available to patients across Northern Ireland. Not only has this project documented significant health gains for patients, but it has also highlighted the potential economic savings likely to accrue from a reduction in patient use of primary and other health care services, a reduction in prescribing levels and reduced absenteeism from work due to ill health.”

In view of this highly positive evaluation, we urge you now to act upon the recommendations contained in the Report, to make CAM therapies such as Homeopathy generally available to patients through the Health Service.

Yours sincerely

Kenneth Mayne RSHom
Chair

CC: Members of the NI Assembly Health Committee
Mr David Brownlow, Chair, Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health
Dr Michael Dixon, Medical Director, Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health
Ms Christine Jendoubi, Director of Primary Care, DHSSPSNI

Response to the Independent Evaluation Report of the Northern Ireland Integrated Medicine Pilot Programme 2007-2008

We are pleased to note that the findings and the recommendations in the Report are entirely congruent with the recommendations made by the NIAH in the years prior to the announcement of the Pilot Programme.

Since 1999 we have briefed successive Ministers of Health and Department of Health officials that the provision of Complementary and Alternative Medical (CAM) therapies such as Homeopathy would produce benefits in:

- *reduction in drugs expenditure*
- *alleviation of GP and hospital workload*
- *savings to the community, industry and commerce in reduced sick leave*
- *increased creativity and productivity*
- *general well-being of society*¹

We also forecast that CAM therapies such as Homeopathy would make a significant contribution toward solving the intractable problems in Government healthcare priority areas such as:

- *health inequalities*
- *deprived areas*
- *effectiveness gaps in conventional medical treatments*²

¹ Homeopathy - A Briefing for Healthcare Policymakers in Northern Ireland, NIAH 2000, 2004

² Kenneth Mayne. Presentation to DHSSPSNI Primary Care Conference, 2006

As the Pilot Programme was a direct result of our representations to the Minister for Health, we are gratified to learn that the Report confirms that we delivered significant health gains and cost-efficiencies in all of the above circumstances. The evaluation includes analyses across a range of indicators, all of which bear out the case we presented in our briefings.

Comparison of NIAH briefing points and reported findings

<i>NIAH Briefing</i>	<i>Reported findings</i>
<i>Reduction in drugs expenditure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Half of GPs reported prescribing less medication and all reported that patients had indicated to them that they needed less• 62% of patients reported suffering from less pain• 55% reported using less painkillers following treatment• Patients using medication reduced from 75% before treatment to 61% after treatment• 44% of those taking medication before treatment had reduced their use afterwards
<i>Alleviation of GP and hospital doctor workload</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 24% of patients who used health services prior to treatment (i.e. primary and secondary care, accident and emergency) reported using the services less after treatment• 65% of GPs reported seeing the patient less following the CAM referral• Half of GPs said the scheme had reduced their workload and 17% reported a financial saving for their practice• Half of GPs said their patients were using secondary care services less
<i>Reduced sick leave ...increased productivity ...general wellbeing of society</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Not only has this project documented significant health gains for patients, but it has also highlighted the potential economic savings likely to accrue from a reduction in patient use of primary and other health care services, a reduction in prescribing levels and reduced absenteeism from work due to ill health.”

Although the commissioning of the Pilot has placed Northern Ireland ahead of the field in the move toward integrated medicine, the United Kingdom as a whole lags behind the rest of the world in making use of CAM as a healthcare resource. Consumer interest in, and use of, complementary medicine is increasing globally. According to the World Health Organization 65-80% of the world's population use complementary therapies for primary health care³.

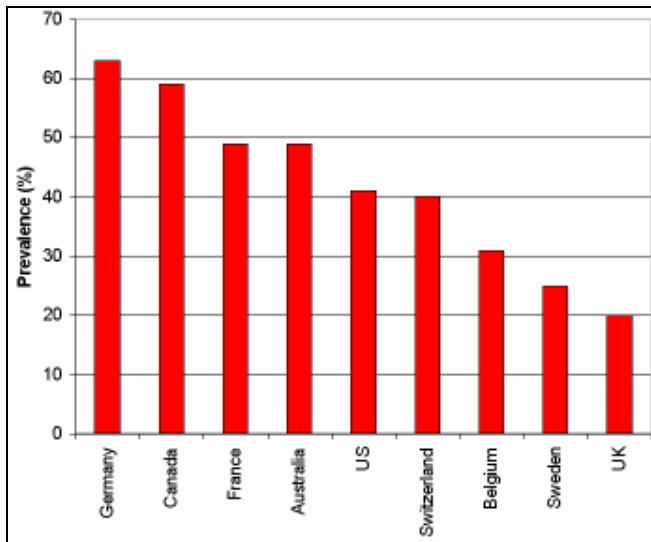


Table 1: Percentage of the population of 9 countries who used CAM during one year, as reported in the *British Medical Journal* in 2000⁴. The data is based on surveys of random or representative samples of population.

Patient choice and demand

“Choice matters because it is at the heart of the Government’s public service reform agenda to empower patients, reduce inequalities in access to health care and improve healthy outcomes for all patients.”⁵

In 2000, nearly 20% of the UK population used CAM, spending more than £550m annually⁶. By July 2007, Mintel reported that 49% of female UK residents had used complementary medicine (CAM). 40% of respondents to Mintel’s survey said they don’t know enough about CAM. Spending on therapies in Britain had increased by 32% in 5 years.⁷

Developing Patient Partnerships, a national consumer organisation, conducted a survey in 2004, which showed that 71% of patients would like to discuss complementary medicine with their GP or pharmacist.⁸ Although they report

³ http://betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Complementary_therapies?OpenDocument

⁴ *BMJ* 2000;321:1133-1135

⁵ Choice Matters – 2007 – Department of Health

⁶ House of Lords Science and Technology Committee: Sixth Report. Complementary and Alternative Medicine, 2000

⁷ http://www.mintel.com/press_release.php?id=288796

⁸ <http://www.dpp.org.uk/en/1/pr2004complementary.qxml>

that 70% of GPs have recommended CAM to their patients, Professor Kate Thomas shows that 90% of CAM treatments are paid for privately⁹, even though 75% of the public would like to see access to complementary medicine on the NHS¹⁰

Social Return On Investment

We welcome the depth of analysis in respect of social factors as a very significant element of the evaluation, often omitted from such studies. This provides useful information relating to the problems of healthcare inequalities and the acknowledged effectiveness gaps in conventional medical treatment, especially of chronic conditions endemic in deprived areas.

We are confident that if the treatments provided in the Pilot Programme were subjected to full Social Return On Investment analysis, they would produce a high index of return compared to many conventional treatments in the same circumstances.

Conclusions and recommendations

The Pilot Programme was the first of its kind in these islands to be commissioned by a Minister of Health. We congratulate the Minister for having implemented such an outstandingly successful project.

At this moment Northern Ireland is seen as the leader in the field, and we request the Minister to maintain this leading position by further developing policy on Integrated Medicine.

Given the highly positive evidence of health gains and economic savings, and the high level of both GP approval and patient demand, we again request the Minister to make CAM therapies, including Homeopathic medicine, available to patients through the Health Service.

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⁹ *Thomas, Nicholl & Coleman*. Use and expenditure on complementary medicine in England: a population-based survey. Source: *Complementary Therapies in Medicine* (2001), 9, 2-11.

¹⁰ Research Council for Complementary Medicine, 1997

