

Alternative Medicine Is Not Pseudoscience, Groups Tell Friends Of Science In Medicine

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AsianScientist (Feb. 3, 2012) - A group of 400 doctors, medical researchers, and scientists, called the Friends of Science in Medicine (FSM), says universities that are awarding degrees in alternative medicine should be named and shamed.

Formed in December 2011, the group, which includes biologist Sir Gustav Nossal and Gardasil vaccine researcher Professor Ian Frazer, has written to university vice-chancellors, saying they should back evidence-based science rather than give "undeserved credibility to what in many cases would be better described as quackery."

Co-founder Professor John Dwyer said 19 universities across the country were currently offering "degrees in pseudoscience," in courses such as homeopathy, iridology, naturopathy, acupuncture, and energy medicine.

Alleged offenders include well-established universities such as the University of Sydney, RMIT, and the University of Queensland.

"Alternative medicine is growing in Australia. We're the laughing stock of some other countries for having so much. It is doing a lot of harm," Prof. Alastair MacLennan of the University of Adelaide told ABC radio.

The group is also campaigning for private health insurance providers to stop providing rebates for complementary medical treatments.

Alternative medicine practitioners fight back

The lobby has come under fire from alternative medicine practitioners such as the Australian Acupuncture & Chinese Medicine Association Limited (AACMA) and the National Herbalists Association of Australia (NHAA), which have called it a "witch hunt," with the intention of stripping complementary medicine of its credibility and standing in Australia.

"Increasingly, high quality evidence supports the efficacy and safety of acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine for a range of common health conditions," said AACMA CEO, Ms. Judy James.

James refuted Prof. Dwyer's claim that subjects such as healing touch therapies, energy medicine,

iridology, and homoeopathy were being "taught as science" in universities. Rather, bona fide practices such as acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine were taught at the bachelor level for more than 16 years and should be protected, James said.

“Acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine have a long history of use as part of the mainstream health systems in China, Japan, Korea, and other parts of South East Asia. The practices are well-established, and are based on a coherent and systematic body of knowledge, which is teachable and researchable,” she said.

James said that from July 1 this year, the Chinese medicine profession has been scheduled for inclusion in the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for the Health Professions. A more constructive approach to dealing with egregious conduct, she said, was to support the introduction of Codes of Conduct and negative licensing approaches adopted in New South Wales and South Australia.

In addition, NHAA defended the need for private health insurance providers to continue providing rebates for CM treatments.

"More than 70 percent of Australians use CMs highlighting that private health insurance companies are unlikely to cease rebates of CM treatments as the demand is simply too high. Hundreds of thousands of Australians are using CMs," said a NHAA statement.

An increase in popularity in Australia

New research from the University of Adelaide has shown that when diagnosed with cancer, [more than 50 percent of Australian men are turning to alternative medicine](#) to help find a cure, or to improve their health.

The study, published recently in the *Annals of Oncology*, is based on an Adelaide questionnaire of 400 men with various types of cancer, and was carried out by psychology graduate student Nadja Klafke.

According to Klafke, published data shows that acupuncture and acupressure may relieve chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, hypnosis and massage are beneficial for cancer-related pain, and meditation and relaxation techniques can relieve fatigue.

“Many complementary therapies have the potential to help reduce common side-effects of cancer treatment and disease symptoms,” said Klafke.

“The popularity of complementary and alternative medicine use in cancer sufferers presumably reflects the benefits – real or perceived – by those who use them,” she said.

Source: [AACMA](#); [Sydney Morning Herald](#); Friends of Science in Medicine.

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