

COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE (CAM)

BACKGROUND

Work has been ongoing over the past year within the Department to engage with CAM stakeholders, raise awareness of CAM and consider integration of CAM in the Health and Personal Social Services. There have been important developments in recent months and the latest position on these is set out below.

CAM SEMINAR

The all-day CAM seminar was held on Thursday 5th October, at the Comfort Hotel in Antrim. This brought together for the first time in Northern Ireland a wide range of CAM interests to consider the issues involved in achieving greater integration of CAM in the HPSS, with particular reference to developments in primary care. There was strong interest in the event, which was fully subscribed and well attended (some 93 people, including some 25 GPs).

Speakers were from the main CAM disciplines (NI Association of Homeopaths, British Acupuncture Council, British Chiropractic Association and the General Osteopathic Council, the NHS Alliance, Get Well UK and the Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health, who were actively involved in planning for the seminar. Ian Brownhill, Programmes Director with the Foundation, gave an address, and Kim Lavelly, Chief Executive, also attended. The day also included a telling contribution from a patient, Siobhan McErlean who had had direct and quite striking beneficial experience of acupuncture.

The seminar culminated in four workshops dealing with the general theme of obstacles to greater integration and how these might be overcome. The output from the workshops will be used to help develop policy options for the further integration of CAM within the health service (informing pilots in 2007) and will be issued in the form of a report to all those who expressed interest in the seminar.

MINISTERIAL ANNOUNCEMENT

Health Minister, Paul Goggins gave the keynote address in which he announced three key initiatives aimed at further integration of CAM and mainstream healthcare services:

INTEGRATION FUND

The Minister announced that he has established a fund of £200,000 to pilot a scheme whereby patients will be able to receive CAM therapies as part of their Health Service treatment. This will involve GPs bidding for resources, through their local Health and Social Services Board, to allow patients to be directly referred from their GP practice.

The scheme will be administered by the Health and Social Services Boards. The Department will be contacting the Boards shortly about the operation of the scheme, including the criteria under which GPs will be able to apply for funding. The scheme will commence in January, and the pilot phase will run for a year. It will be fully evaluated with an eye to roll-out in subsequent years.

INTEGRATED HEALTH AWARDS

The Minister also announced additional funding for the introduction of an Integrated Health Awards scheme. This initiative will run in partnership with the Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health and will recognise and support the work carried out by many of the CAM practitioners in Northern Ireland.

The awards scheme is run by the Prince's Foundation across the UK to support good practice for organisations that deliver integrated health care services that meet the needs of the community. The Foundation has an arrangement with the Welsh Assembly for an award scheme specifically aimed at services in Wales. The Department and the Foundation for Integrated Health have worked in partnership using the Welsh model to set up an award scheme for Northern Ireland.

In 2005 the UK awards scheme attracted over 50 applicants covering 200 projects including:

Hospices

Musculoskeletal services

GP surgeries treating chronic conditions with CAM therapies

Mental health services using acupuncture, aromatherapy and massage

CAM therapies to treat carers and staff

Addiction services employing acupuncture, physical activities, reiki and massage

The Department and the Foundation will have the scheme operational here in January next year with the first winners announced in December 2007 and the awards presented at a special event in January 2008.

INTEGRATED HEALTH ASSOCIATES

The purpose of the Integrated Health Associates (IHA) initiative is to deliver to patients the widest range of safe and effective means to get well, manage symptoms and stay healthy. By 2009, the Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health's ambition is to have established IHA as a national network of 9,000 GPs, nurses, midwives, osteopaths, chiropractors, physiotherapists and regulated complementary practitioners using an integrated approach to delivering patient care. Approximately 50% of members will be GPs. It is anticipated that there will be at least 200 members of the scheme from Northern Ireland by the end of 2009. The Foundation will launch IHA nationwide in November 2006.

REGULATION OF CAM THERAPIES

A formal Working Group has been set up by the Department of Health (London) to prepare for regulation of acupuncture, herbal medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioners (not medicines). NI is represented on the Group, which is preparing the way for formal regulation in relation to education and training, registration, fitness to practice etc. The next meeting of the working group is on the 28 November 2006.

It is intended that a public consultation on a draft document based on the results of this exercise will be held in the autumn of 2007 with a view to laying statutory instruments, giving effect to the proposals, before Parliament in the first quarter of 2008.

VOLUNTARY SELF-REGULATION

The Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health is currently working in partnership with a number of complementary therapy areas to encourage them to establish a form of voluntary self-regulation. The following professions are taking part in this work:

Alexander technique voluntary self- regulation group

Aromatherapy consortium

Bowen forum

Cranial forum

Council of organisations registering homeopaths

General council for massage therapists

General naturopathic therapists

Nutritional therapy council

Reflexology forum

Reiki regulatory working group

British council for yoga therapists

The Foundation have informed us that it now has a clear mandate to pursue a federal approach to voluntary self-regulation and that it will be actively pursuing the implementation of this initiative over the next eighteen months.