

**PRINCE OF WALES'S FOUNDATION FOR
INTEGRATED HEALTH**

**Consultation: Complementary Healthcare; a guide for
patients**

Response by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain

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Dr John Clements, Science Secretary

The Prince of Wales's Foundation for Integrated Health

Complementary Healthcare: a guide for patients

Consultation document

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain is the regulatory and professional body for pharmacists in Great Britain. It has responsibilities in relation to the education, registration, conduct and practice of pharmacists, and it register and inspects pharmacies. The Society is also a Chartered body with objects concerning the advancement of science and the application of pharmaceutical knowledge.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society is pleased to offer the following comments on the consultation document.

The Society commends the Foundation for Integrated Health for producing a guide for patients. There is a wide range of information available to the public but much of this is of doubtful quality. The production of a publication with more authoritative status is, therefore, to be greatly welcomed.

General points

1 We believe that more emphasis should be given to the need for members of the public who are purchasing products (as opposed to services) *to ask for advice* about the product. Pharmacists are trained as experts on medicines and the public, when making purchases in pharmacies, would expect to seek advice from pharmacists who had undertaken suitable training or had specialist knowledge. [See also point 4 below.]

2 At a number of points, reference is made to the recording of a medical history. As generally understood by the public, this would not include the declaration of medicines being taken, whether prescribed or purchased, to the practitioner. [See also point 4 below.]

3 For some therapies, advice is given to the patient on the need to be dressed or undressed for the treatment. For consistency, this statement should be added under other therapies where undressing may be needed (such as aromatherapy).

Specific points

4. Under *1. About this guide*, the point should be made that pharmacists are an important point of reference for the public in discussing the use of complementary medicines in combination with prescribed or other medicines bought over the counter because they are the trained health care professional knowledgeable about interactions. Many patients choose to take complementary medicines at the same time as conventional medicines but do not recognise these as “medicines”.

5 Under *2. How to use this guide step-by-step*, amplify the reference to “medical treatment” to make sure the person concerned declares any medicines, both prescribed or purchased, that he or she is taking (page 3). This declaration is much more important in some complementary therapies, such as herbal medicine, than others.

6. Under *4. Where to find a complementary healthcare practitioner / Charities and community organisations* it is important to make the point that the organisations listed in the yellow pages are reputable (presumably this is so). Where a therapy is subject to regulation, the competent authority should be highlighted.

7 Under *4. Where to find a complementary healthcare practitioner / NHS*, In addition to the options identified (“practitioners work alongside GPs...”, “practitioner working nearby”), there are a number of established centres, such as the Gateway Clinic in Lewisham which patients can attend. [Page 6].

8 Under *5. Complementary therapies and the law, Box 1* Pharmacists are another example of health professionals who are regulated by statute and it would be appropriate to mention them here. [Page 7]

9 Under *6. Questions to ask a practitioner before going for treatment*, consider the addition of another bullet point, as follows. “Is the cost of the treatment covered by the NHS or private health insurance?” The advice we have received from pharmacists is that customers sometimes fail to establish this point with the practitioner, with the potential for subsequent difficulties both for them and the practitioner. [Page 9]

10 Under *7. Acupuncture*, the view is that the difference between the two types of acupuncture would not be clear to the lay reader, and so perhaps this could be expanded.

11 Under *12. Herbal Medicines / Precautions*, please add pharmacists to the list of those who can be consulted about purchased herbal remedies. [Pages 22-23]. Also, we feel that the first paragraph (“Herbal medicine makes use...”) is inaccurate in that not all conventional drugs are derived from plant origins. In addition, herbalists make use of plant products, such as extracts whereas it is implied that they use only the plant itself.

12. Under 13. *Homoeopathy/ Precautions*, second paragraph, please note that a number of pharmacists are trained homoeopaths.

13 Under 15. *Massage therapy*, it has been pointed out to us that the intensity of massage can vary greatly between different types of massage and this may warrant a comment. It would be helpful to reassure those with young children requiring massage, and the elderly that the level of massage used by a practitioner is appropriate for the individual concerned.