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THE OTHER MEDICINE 5.

RADIO 4

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NOT CHECKED AS BROADCAST

MUSIC

MONTAGE

Nobody can treat an animal unless they have a veterinary licence but anybody can treat the animal's owner without any kind of licence whatsoever.

Statutory regulation is not a panacea, you can't protect, for example, unqualified practitioners from practising, even if you have a statutory scheme.

Here we're trying to bring together Western medical treatments, so orthodox medicine, complementary medical practitioners, the Chinese community, the nursing profession and somehow we're trying to find a way of all working together.

FORD

Complementary and alternative medicine is such a vast and varied field, it doesn't easily lend itself to regulation. At the moment apart from chiropractors and osteopaths, practitioners don't have to join any official register or take any course of training before they start to practise. But with so many of us using this form of healthcare today, the government is planning to take action, both to regulate the practitioners and the thousands of practitioners who are not regulated.

CLARKE

The single most important thing it's done is that when a patient goes to see an osteopath they know that that person has been - has demonstrated themselves to be safe and competent to a set of agreed standards. They also know that that practitioner is insured because all osteopaths registered with us must have professional indemnity insurance and they also know that if - were anything to go wrong - God forbid - there is a complaints mechanism and a proper way of bringing that osteopath to book if they have either demonstrated professional incompetence or unacceptable professional conduct.

FORD

Do osteopaths now feel that they are a profession - they're properly regarded as a profession?

CLARKE

Yes they do.

FORD

And what is their relationship now with GPs would you say?

CLARKE

I think it's variable, if one's to be fair. Quite a number of osteopaths work closely with local GPs, others don't have a particularly close relationship with them and in some areas GPs don't have any contact at all with osteopaths. But compared with say 10 or 15 years ago even that is quite a big change.

FORD

And what would you do if there were a registered osteopath who was guilty of unprofessional conduct in some way?

CLARKE

Well we have a number of options available to us. First of all, having made a complaint it's investigated by our investigating committee who determine whether there is a case to answer. If they so determine it's referred to the professional conduct committee and if they find that that person is guilty of unacceptable professional conduct or professional incompetence they can either be struck off the register - erased from the register - which means they can't practise as osteopaths, they can be suspended for up to a year, we can impose conditions of practice to ensure that they become safe and competent, they can be admonished which is effeom fore

MIDDLETON

I think it's opened the doors, the modern GP or consultant who is au fait with modern medical research wouldn't hesitate but to refer a patient to a chiropractor and be very happy with it. Because I've lectured so extensively in my area and to GPs and consultants over the years they roughly knew what we did anyway and I'm part of the post-graduate medical circuit for GPs and in the last three weeks I've had six medical doctors watching me work. That opens up the doors, once they realise our limitations, they realise that we're very honest and we tell people what we can't do they're more than happy to refer patients to us.

FORD

By establishing these codes of conduct covering ethics and professional standards, organisations like the British Chiropractic Association try to ensure that their members don't overstep the mark and make exaggerated claims about the therapeutic benefits of chiropractic, giving the public the wrong impression about what conditions can be treated and what can't.

MIDDLETON

We don't deal with immunisations or diseases in any way shape or form. There's nothing chiropractic can do for a disease. We're mechanical, we treat mechanical problems - we treat pain, pins and needles, numbness and weakness of mechanical origin, so we treat bad backs, sciatica and things - we don't treat tumours, we don't treat diseases, we don't treat all the arthrotides or forms of arthritis. Individual chiropractors like individual doctors of medicine might give varying opinions but we shouldn't move out of our field, we don't need to.

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FORD

Julie Stone.

More than 40 higher educational institutions now offer studies in one or more forms of complementary medicine, often at degree level. The pioneer, was the University of Westminster's Department of Complementary Studies, whose chair is Brian Isbell. He explained that it's a challenge to integrate traditional therapies into modern academia.

ISELL

It's been a very delicate balance because obviously making academic programmes out of therapies has been a challenge. But provided it's a partnership between the practitioner resource that we're using, the academics that we have, the professional bodies we can get the balance right. And the balance needs to be right because obviously we need skilled practitioners, ones that not only can talk about what they do but obviously practise effectively. In fact the themes of health sciences, practitioner development and research go throughout the courses. So it's not as if there's sort of a division or polarisation because obviously if we organise the course like that the students may see it in that way. So in fact their therapy plus the other themes are taught all the way through the course, so that they see it as integrated package. And the other thing which we feel is vital is that not only do they have the opportunity to of course learn in mixed groups - that is with those studying other therapies - but we do our utmost to make sure they get experience of working in the NHS as well.

FORD

Education, ethical guidelines and practitioner development - all positive moves towards best practice in the CAM world.

But as far as regulation goes, don't expect a general council of aromatherapy or crystal healing in the near future, if ever.

When the House of Lords published its landmark report on complementary medicine in 2000, they recommended that only certain therapies would need to be regulated. They were those which "pose a direct risk to public health", which could demonstrate a significant body of research, and whose practitioners shared a common ideology. Two professions which have met most of those criteria are acupuncture and herbal medicine.

Buito
fid

O'FARRELL

It's in our interests that we work together. I don't think it's in our interests or the public's interests that we should combine acupuncture and herbal medicine in one generic body unless we're able to clearly specify within that body the responsibilities of each. For me it's very, very important that the public is able to look at a li

LANDALE

I wanted to really find out what was really making acupuncture tick, why did it work in some people and perhaps didn't work in others? And so I started looking for different points and I've come up with a whole class of new acupuncture points that do a better job.

FORD

That's very interesting because the Chinese were doing this for 2,000 years and you've said not all of what they did was right, so you found a new way of doing acupuncture which you call neuro-acupuncture.

LANDALE

That's correct but I'm not trying to say they were wrong. Acupuncture works whatever the name you give it, it's just that some points are more powerful than others. So I've merely found other points to give me a stronger effect and I use them in my own manner, I don't think in terms of fire, earth, metal, water and wood as a traditional acupuncturist would, I don't look for chi energies because I don't believe there are any. But it is your body's own nervous energy that produces the changes.

FORD

Now this change in your thought process and in your practice led to a bit of a fall out with the British Acupuncture Council didn't it?

LANDALE

Only in my method of description. The British Acupuncture Council wanted me to write my notes in a traditional manner and I didn't want to do that and in fact they gave me two weeks to do it in and I refused and so I gave my resignation in because of that.

FORD

And has that had any implications for you, I mean has it meant that you can't practise in this sphere?

LANDALE

Oh not at all, no. The British Acupuncture Council has no - has no authority as to whether anyone can practise - this is one of the thorns in the side of the acupuncturists at the moment because a lot of acupuncturists are masquerading as acupuncturists when really they're not. There's a lot of shops that's grown up - I won't name them - but the shops in almost every shopping centre but the people inside them are not qualified and so this is why the government through the British Acupuncture Council

are talking to categorise all acupuncturists and I strongly agree with that. (0125619041)

disciplines. If all of those practitioners could be represen