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## Pilot Survey of Primary Care Trusts

Over the last year and with the help of many of you, we have conducted a pilot survey among Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) in the UK. For this pilot supporters of H:MC21 sent a questionnaire to their PCT, asking various questions about access to homeopathic treatment on the NHS (click [here](#) to see the full questionnaire).

The results of this pilot study will be published on our [website](#) shortly. Some of the key points are given below:

Of 373 PCTs, Local Health Boards and Local Health & Social Care Groups in the UK 26 PCTs (7.0%) were surveyed in the pilot. Of these:

- 21 PCTs (80.8%) stated that they do not routinely provide homeopathy, though 3 PCTs (11.5%) also stated that GPs in their area may prescribe homeopathy themselves
- 1 (7.1%) did not state whether they did or did not offer homeopathy
- 4 (15.4%) stated that they provide homeopathy, making a total of 7 PCTs (26.9%) in which patients can receive homeopathic treatment

Of the 21 PCTs which have decided not to provide homeopathy

- 13 PCTs (61.9%) provided no information about whether decision-makers have professional knowledge of homeopathy
- 5 PCTs (23.8%) did not hold such information about decision-makers
- 3 PCTs (14.3%) stated that some decision-makers had some knowledge

Of these 21 PCTs, in answer to the question "What criteria are used by the Board and any relevant advisory committees or individuals to assess homeopathic treatment when deciding not to provide the option of this treatment?"

- 8 PCTs (38.1%) provided no information
- 13 PCTs (61.9%) mentioned clinical effectiveness
- 5 PCTs (23.8%) mentioned cost effectiveness
- 1 PCT (4.8%) mentioned safety

The most important point that emerges from this survey is that there appears to be very little information available about the decision-makers and the decision-making process which prevents patients from accessing homeopathy on the NHS in many areas. This is a serious issue, since most of the 21 PCTs who do not provide homeopathy were informative about the general criteria they use, and a majority of

them claimed to base their decision on a lack of evidence of clinical effectiveness. On the other hand, one PCT which does offer homeopathy actually provided references to evidence of both clinical and cost effectiveness. The implication is that where decision makers are well-informed, homeopathy is provided, but that most PCTs do not appear to consider it necessary to ensure that those making the decisions about this approach are fully qualified to do so.

The full report of the pilot study will be released shortly, and we are preparing to follow this up with a full survey of all PCTs, Local Health Boards and Local Health & Social Care Groups.

## Free Speech or Defamation?

We urge supporters to write to the Editor of the Observer protesting at the newspaper's support for Simon Singh. A template letter is given below and is available on our [website](#).

Simon Singh and his supporters are claiming that the judge's ruling in the libel case brought against him by the British Chiropractic Association (BCA) is an attack on free speech. However, Judge Mr Justice Eady has stated that:

"12. What the article conveys is that the BCA itself makes claims to the public as to the efficacy of chiropractic treatment for certain ailments even though there is not a jot of evidence to support those claims. That in itself would be an irresponsible way to behave and it is an allegation that is plainly defamatory of anyone identifiable as the culprit. In this case these claims are expressly attributed to the claimant. It goes further. It is said that despite its outward appearance of respectability, it is happy to promote bogus treatments. Everyone knows what bogus treatments are. They are not merely treatments which have proved less effective than they were at first thought to be, or which have been shown by the subsequent acquisition of more detailed scientific knowledge to be ineffective. Bogus treatments equate to quack remedies; that is to say they are dishonestly presented to a trusting and, in some respects perhaps, vulnerable public as having proven efficacy in the treatment of certain conditions or illnesses, when it is known that there is nothing to support such claims.

13. It is alleged that the claimant promotes the bogus treatments "happily". What that means is not that they do it naively or innocently believing in their efficacy, but rather that they are quite content and, so to speak, with their eyes open to present what are known to be bogus treatments as useful and effective. That is in my judgment the plainest allegation of dishonesty and indeed it accuses them of thoroughly disreputable conduct."<sup>(1)</sup>

The judge has made clear that such allegations are seriously damaging and must be proven to be true. Simon Singh and his supporters seem to think they have the right to say what they like and call it "free speech".

H:MC21 considers that it is unacceptable for a newspaper to support unsubstantiated attacks on the reputation and livelihoods of alternative therapists, and we urge you to join us in protesting at their support.

(1) <http://jackofkent.blogspot.com/2009/05/bca-v-singh-official-ruling.html>

*Letter template (Please adapt this to suit your own writing style)*

Dear Editor

I am shocked to find that the Observer is willing to support Simon Singh in respect of the libel case brought against him by the British Chiropractic Association.

Simon Singh made his statements about the BCA on the basis of *Trick or Treatment?*, a book he co-authored with Edzard Ernst. A detailed study by *Homeopathy: Medicine for the 21st Century* has shown that this book "has no validity as a scientific examination of alternative medicine", which means that he had no factual basis for his remarks.

Alleging that an organisation "happily promotes bogus treatments" without having any evidence to back such a claim is quite rightly not an issue of free speech, but of libel, and Simon Singh has justifiably been called to account. For a respected newspaper to defend groundless accusations as "free speech" is to make a mockery of its claims to report the world honestly.

We urge you to reconsider your support for a "science writer" who has shown himself prepared to redefine science and to misrepresent the facts in order to defend his beliefs.

Yours faithfully

## Darwin tested ultra-high dilutions

Many of you will be aware that it is the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth. His ground-breaking work 'Origin of the Species' published in 1859, put forward the controversial theory of evolution. Of course, Darwin is now part of the scientific canon and yesterday's outrageous idea has become today's orthodoxy, but what might today's scientists have made of his explorations into ultra high dilutions of salts?

From 1860 onwards, Darwin investigated the effects of dilutions of salts of ammonia on *Drosera* (sundew). When exposed to these salt solutions the tentacles of the *Drosera* plant would turn inwards, however Darwin discovered the same results could be achieved with weaker and weaker dilutions. Having achieved an effect from a dilution of 1/20,000,000th of a grain of salt, Darwin was both staggered and frightened by what he had observed. In a letter to Charles Lyell written on 24

November 1860, he says “I care more about Drosera than the origin of all the species in the world. But I will not publish on Drosera until next year, for I am frightened and astounded by my results”. In fact Darwin was not happy to publish the work until 1875 (in *Insectivorous Plants*) and only after he had repeated the experiments countless times to rule out any source of error.

(with thanks to Homeopath Sue Young; read more on Sue's [website](#))

## PLEASE MAKE A DONATION TO FUND OUR CAMPAIGN

If every one of you on this email list (over 6,000 people) gives even just one pound, we could be much more active and promote the campaign more prominently.

**Please donate now – every £ helps!!**

Click [here](#) and you will be taken to our website with the link to PayPal.

**You do not need to have a PayPal account; scroll down the PayPal page and on your left you will find how to pay by debit or credit card.**

**And if you are a UK taxpayer, don't forget to send us the [Gift Aid Form](#), which you can download [here](#) from our website.**

Or get together with a few friends or patients, collect a donation from each and send us a cheque (made out to H:MC21) to

The Treasurer  
H:MC21  
The Old Farmhouse  
Filgrave  
Bucks MK16 9ET

Thanks a lot to all of you who made donations over the past weeks! We aim to acknowledge every donation; every single contribution is important to us, and we apologise if we have forgotten to write to or email any of you.