

A European approach to non-conventional medicines

Author(s): Parliamentary Assembly

Origin - See [Doc. 8435](#), report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mrs Ragnarsdóttir Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 4 November 1999.

1. The Assembly reaffirms the importance it attaches to conventional medicines whose effectiveness has been proved scientifically and which form the basis of European social protection systems. It notes, however, that alternative, complementary and non-conventional forms of medicine are growing in importance in Europe and throughout the world. The extent to which they are recognised and the legal status they enjoy vary greatly from one country to the next.

2. The best established forms include acupuncture, homeopathy, osteopathy and chiropractic. However, these are not alone among less conventional methods, some of which have been in existence for a very long time, and all of which respond to a demand. Patients themselves are increasingly calling for the use of different forms of treatment. This is a fact that cannot be ignored. The Assembly recognises the pre-eminence of conventional medicines; however, the various forms of medicine should not compete with one another: it is possible for them to exist side by side and complement one another.

3. In the health field, it is important to preserve the diversity of national legislation and practice that is one of Europe's assets: people's attachment to their own systems and traditions must not be called into question. Nevertheless, the Assembly believes that a common European approach to non-conventional medicine based on the principle of patients' freedom of choice in health care should not be ruled out.

4. It welcomes the resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 29 May 1997 on the status of non-conventional medicine, which calls on the European Union to begin a process of recognising non-conventional forms of medicine after the necessary studies have been conducted and also to develop research programmes on the safety and effectiveness of these medicines.

5. The Assembly agrees that, in the current grey area of non-conventional medicine, it is necessary to separate the wheat from the chaff. The demands of public health and the right of individuals to health protection must come first. The limitations of non-conventional medicines must not be ignored nor underestimated. Support should not be given to dubious or intolerant practices that would deny people and, in particular, children, the medical care their state of health demands. Establishing a legal framework for non-conventional medicine is a difficult undertaking, but it is preferable to being too liberal.

6. The Assembly believes that the best guarantee for patients lies in a properly trained profession, which is aware of its limitations, has a system of ethics and self-regulation, and is also subject to outside control. It would be unrealistic to wish to prevent the emergence of new professions in the health sector. The regulations that currently exist in certain European countries on the practice of one or other form of non-conventional medicine open the way for progress. The Assembly calls on the member states to model their approach on their neighbours' experiments and, whenever possible, to co-ordinate their position with regard to these medicines.

7. The Assembly believes that in the future alternative or complementary forms of medicine could be practised by doctors of conventional medicine as well as by any well-trained practitioner of non-conventional medicine (a patient could consult one or the other, either upon referral by his or her family doctor or of his or her free will), should

ethical principals prevail. Appropriate courses should be offered in universities to train allopathic doctors in alternative and complementary forms of treatment. The Assembly therefore calls on member states to promote official recognition of these forms of medicine in medical faculties and to encourage hospitals to use them.

8. Lastly, as knowledge of alternative forms of medicine is still limited, the Assembly calls on the member states to support and speed up the comparative studies and research programmes currently under way in the European Union and to disseminate the findings widely.