

In memory and celebration of a wonderfully warm-hearted and talented man:



Professor Mike Pittilo: born Edinburgh 7 October, 1954, died Aberdeen 16 February, 2010.

I first met Mike Pittilo in the mid 1990s during the early days of the development of the Prince of Wales Foundation for Integrated Health (PFIH). He and I found ourselves working side by side on the Education and Training Working Group, one of four groups set up at the suggestion of the Prince of Wales to consider how orthodox and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) might work more closely together. I was immediately struck by Mike's lovely sense of humour, easy manner (he was always insistent that it was 'Mike' never 'Professor'), great enthusiasm and profound knowledge of all aspects of medical training - all put to good use as the group developed its guidelines for integrating CAM and conventional medicine for the benefit of patients. The work done then formed a cornerstone of the seminal Discussion Document, "*Integrated Healthcare: a way forward for the next five years?*" published by the fledgling PFIH in 1997.

When the House of Lords Select Committee on Science and Technology published its report on CAM in 2000, the Department of Health (DH) responded to the call by the Select Committee to bring in statutory regulation of herbal medicine practitioners and acupuncturists by deciding to set up two independent regulatory working groups, one on acupuncture and one on herbal medicine, to see how best to implement this policy. As Chair of the European Herbal and Traditional Medicine Practitioners Association, I was asked by the DH to sit on the interviewing panel to select the chair for the new DH Herbal Medicine Regulatory Working Group (HMRWG) on Herbal Medicine. When I received the DH's list of those on the shortlist for the job, I immediately saw there was a glaring omission – the name of Mike Pittilo was missing. I have never ceased to thank my lucky stars that my request to add Mike's name to the list of interviewees was accepted by the DH. In the interview, he was simply outstanding and the decision to offer him the job was unanimous: what an inspired choice he turned out to be! The Civil Servant in charge at the time was called Gordon Brown which sometimes made for some hilarious misunderstandings when we on the regulatory working group casually dropped into the conversation that the two men working out our professional future were Gordon Brown and Michael Pittilo.

Over the next decade as the path towards statutory regulation of this sector underwent a series of twists, turns and reversals, Mike used to tease me about that interview saying that we had underplayed just what a tough job it would turn out to be. When he asked our Gordon Brown how much time he would have to allocate to the project, the Civil Servant replied, “Oh perhaps just a few hours a week at the most.” The reality was that over the next nine years, it was for Mike often another full time job on top of his extremely busy academic career. When he accepted the role of Chair of the HMRWG, he was foundation dean of the faculty of health and social care sciences at Kingston University and St George's Medical School, part of the University of London. Shortly afterwards in 2001, he was appointed pro vice-chancellor at the University of Hertfordshire where his responsibilities included academic planning, quality assurance and learning and teaching, along with the establishment of a postgraduate medical school and a school of pharmacy.

In September 2005, when the work on regulation was about to enter a new and yet more demanding phase, he took up the position of principal and vice-chancellor at Aberdeen's Robert Gordon University (RGU). How on earth he managed it all, none of us involved with the regulatory working groups will ever know. Despite taking on the onerous role of Chair of the DH Steering Group on the statutory regulation of practitioners of acupuncture, herbal medicine and traditional Chinese medicine in June 2006, he simultaneously managed to transform his university's standing. RGU was quoted as the best modern UK university in *The Times Good University Guide* for 2009 and 2010 and Mike reinvigorated the university's research strategy so that RGU achieved outstanding results in the Research Assessment Exercise 2008, with more than 70 per cent of its research classified as of international quality. At the same time, from 2003 until last year, he was also a hard-working trustee of the PFIH.

In the meantime, Mike was coping with the constant demands of the often turbulent process of bringing about regulation of herbalists, acupuncturists and practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine. The Steering Group he chaired for almost two years needed the skills of a top negotiator since it involved brokering agreement between groups who for many years had been at loggerheads. In addition, it needed a good knowledge of medicines law, of Government health regulation policy, of standards of education and a clear view at all times of the interests of patients who wished to access these CAM modalities. Mike discharged these duties with lightness of touch and good humour that diffused difficulties and brought people to their senses and together. Throughout 2007 and through the early part of 2008, not only did he chair meetings every three weeks of the DH regulatory steering group, but he also managed to find time to write the steering group's final report, overseeing its editing and publication in May 2008. According to Mike's obituary in *The Scotsman*, his report to ministers from the Department of Health steering group on "*Statutory Regulation of Practitioners of Acupuncture, Herbal Medicine, Traditional Chinese Medicine and other Traditional Medicine Systems*" remains one of the most downloaded publications from the Universities Institutional Repository.

What very few people around him knew was that all the time Mike was chairing the DH steering group, he was being treated for kidney cancer that had spread first to his hip and then to his brain. Never for a moment did he complain about his illness or the chemo and

radiotherapy he was enduring. When I went with him to present the steering group report to the Health Minister, Ben Bradshaw, in June 2008, Mike left University College Hospital on crutches to come to the meeting. Three weeks earlier, his hip had fractured whilst he was staying in a London hotel. He told me that whilst lying prone on the floor in his room, he rang down to reception to ask for help and if they could kindly give him his bill. In the event, the bill was pushed under the door and he had to phone again to get the ambulance he needed to get him to A&E. I said to him that sometimes it paid to make a fuss; he just laughed it off!

He never allowed any of this to interfere with his chosen tasks. On 9th February, a week before he died, he wrote a letter to *The Times* which reiterated the reasons why statutory regulation of practitioners of herbal medicine and acupuncture was essential... it is worthwhile reproducing it here:

'In June 2006 Jane Kennedy established a steering group convened by myself to prepare the ground for the regulation of those using acupuncture and herbal medicine along with other traditional medicine systems practised in the UK. We reported in May 2008.

There was a great deal of criticism of the report and a public consultation by the DH has recently been completed. The report's recommendations are entirely consistent with health policy over the past decade. A previous consultation on regulating herbal medicine and acupuncture received overwhelming support resulting in a timeframe for regulation being set by the DH that has not been adhered to.

Resistance comes mainly from scientists who say that statutory regulation will give credit to disciplines where the evidence base is very thin. The forceful nature of the criticism has resulted in some universities withdrawing programmes, even where there was scientific content that would have helped to inform critical appraisal of evidence. The steering group placed high emphasis on improving the evidence base, even stating that it should be mandatory for NHS funding.

This should, however, proceed alongside implementing statutory regulation and not as a prerequisite to it. There is very high public demand for herbal medicine and acupuncture. The public deserve to be protected as much as possible. Statutory regulation will enable this.'

Mike Pittilo was a man of many parts and popular wherever he went. He was the author of publications on parasitology and atherosclerosis. In his spare time - how did he find it? – he enjoyed hill-walking, photography and was an expert clay pigeon shot as well as enjoying good wine and company. He will be sorely missed by those who knew him as an inspiring leader, close colleague and warm-hearted friend. We in the integrated medicine community owe him a huge debt of gratitude and we extend our sincerest condolences to his wife Carol, a practising GP.

Michael McIntyre
26/2/10