

NEXT STEPS FOR COMPLEMENTARY THERAPY

Proposals for improving safeguards for people using herbal medicines, traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture, were announced by Health Secretary Andy Burnham today.

These services are often accessed via private clinics and high street shops rather than from the National Health Service. The move to take tougher action to regulate practitioners follows the views of members of the public and the wider scientific community, who responded to a joint public consultation on behalf of all 4 UK countries last year.

Andy Burnham said:

“Emerging evidence clearly demonstrates that the public needs better protection, but in a way that is measured and does not place unreasonable extra burdens on practitioners.

“I am therefore minded to legislate to ensure that all practitioners supplying unlicensed herbal medicines to members of the public in England must be registered with the Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC).

“I believe that the introduction of such a register will increase public protection, but without the full trappings of professional recognition which are applied to practitioners of orthodox healthcare.

“I will be considering the similar measures we need to put in place to afford an appropriate level of protection for people using acupuncture treatments.

“I will be discussing this with Ministers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as the regulation of these groups is devolved and

they are currently considering the consultation responses. A full joint response will be published in due course.”

The Health Secretary also called on the NHS in England to take part in a pilot scheme to assess the feasibility and benefits of providing access to patients for certain forms of complementary and alternative medicine for the treatment of chronic low back pain.

Primary Care Trusts will be invited to participate in the pilot to help determine whether these therapies can be effectively integrated as part of NHS primary care management of these patients.

In consultation with their GP, patients will be able to choose their preferred therapy in line with NICE guidance on treatment of low back pain, which supports use of acupuncture and manual therapy for this condition.

The pilot will be undertaken within the framework of a rigorous independent evaluation which will be led by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) National School for Primary Care Research.

Andy Burnham said:

“Low back pain affects 7 out of 10 people at some time in their lives. This pilot and its evaluation will provide us with good evidence about the benefits for patients and value to the NHS of extending the treatment choices available for the management of a disabling and costly condition.”

Notes to editors

1. NICE Guidance on the early management of persistent non-specific low back pain can be found here: <http://guidance.nice.org.uk/CG88>
2. For further information please contact the Department of Health Newsdesk on 020 7210 5221