

REGISTRATION OF NATURAL THERAPISTS

"The current popularity and growth of Natural Therapies must not be hindered by well meaning but inappropriate moves by some to have Governments register practitioners." Former President of the Australian Traditional-Medicine Society, Sandi Rogers said this today at the Society's Annual General Meeting in Perth.

Ms Rogers called on all political parties not head down the disastrous track of trying to register traditional medicine practitioners. "We have entirely adequate regulation through our own organisations. "The ATMS strongly opposes statutory registration of complementary medicine practitioners. The main reason for this is that complementary medicine practitioners do not fulfill the criteria for registration set by the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council.

Ms Rogers said, "In April 1995 Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council (AHMAC) released a report entitled Working Group Advising on Criteria and Process for Assessment of Regulatory Requirements for Unregulated Health Occupations. The report outlined the six criteria for assessing the need for statutory regulation of unregulated health occupations.

The criteria are:

- Is it appropriate for Health Ministers to exercise responsibility for regulating the occupation in question, or does the occupation more appropriately fall within the domain of another Ministry?
- Do the activities of the occupation pose a significant risk of harm to the health and safety of the public?
- Do existing regulatory or other mechanisms fail to address health and safety issues?
- Is regulation possible to implement for the occupation in question?
- Is regulation practical to implement for the occupation in question?
- Do the benefits to the public of regulation clearly outweigh the potential negative impact of such regulation?

"The practice of complementary medicine does not fulfil AHMAC's six criteria, and therefore complementary medicine practice does not qualify for statutory registration," Ms Rogers said.

"Curiously though, some practitioners, academics and bureaucrats want traditional medicine practitioners to be registered. Some practitioners like to think that registration would make themselves appear more credible and professional. I would respond that we have adequate credibility. We have universities, governments, health funds and the pharmacy profession all vying for our profession. Having achieved this credibility, why then would we hand over our professions to health bureaucrats to regulate.

"Another reason proposed for registering traditional medicine practitioners is the public would have greater confidence in us. Surely the vast and increasing number of informed, educated consumer coming through our doors highlights the confidence that the public has in traditional medicine practitioners.

There are other equally weak arguments for Government registration, all of which deny the fundamentals about traditional medicine. "The complementary medicine professions are like the sea. They have been around for centuries in an unstructured environment, they ebb and flow, there is a self levelling mechanism that removes non-performing modalities and popularity of modalities rise and fall like waves on the ocean. No-one has ever seriously sought to regulate the sea!" Ms Rogers said.

Ms. Rogers said, "In the context of the coming federal election, political parties might be tempted to suggest that traditional medicine practitioners should be registered. Now that we are having a renaissance of Natural Therapies, the ATMS will fight any such proposal to constrict our profession into the same bureaucratic nightmare as western medicine. Traditional medicine relies too heavily on freedom of thought, acceptance of history, adoption of traditional practices and research by individuals to be regulated and restricted."

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