

## **CAM SPEECH**

### **COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES AND MEDICINES SEMINAR**

**THURSDAY 5 OCTOBER 2006**

Thank you Christine [Jendoubi] for those kind words of welcome.

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here with you this morning at the first ever seminar hosted by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to consider current and future developments in Complementary and Alternative Therapies and Medicines (or CAM as we all know it).

It is very encouraging to see such a large turn-out from such a wide range of interests. Indeed such has been the demand for places that we have had to restrict the numbers attending. I think it is fair to say that this reflects the tremendous level of interest in Northern Ireland in complementary therapies

The theme for today is the further integration of complementary therapies in the health service. And the seminar is an exciting opportunity for those with an interest in complementary therapies to meet and share ideas, to identify barriers to joint working and come up with solutions for overcoming these barriers.

So while there are many here who are complementary therapy practitioners or who work in the relevant representative organisations I am delighted to say that we also have strong representation from the mainstream healthcare sector. As such the seminar provides the opportunity for those who have responsibility for service provision within the health service – both service planners and commissioners as well as practitioners such as GPs - to hear more of the potential which is locked up in the complementary sector.

One of my first engagements when I arrived in Northern Ireland was to attend the Secretary of State's garden party at Hillsborough where I got to meet a wide range of CAM practitioners - and I know that some of you are here today - and to experience at first hand the enthusiasm and commitment you all have for your

chosen therapy area. I was particularly impressed by the range of therapies available and by the diversity of healthcare issues which are potentially covered by complementary therapies.

There is evidence to suggest that people are increasingly turning to complementary therapies. The reasons for this are often complex. But complementary and alternative medicine and therapies have proven in certain circumstances to be extremely helpful and I have been impressed and encouraged by the examples of good work that are already being carried out, for example in palliative care.

The safety of the patient is of course paramount at all times. I have a fundamental responsibility to protect the health of the public and this will always be my unerring priority, whether the services in question are in mainstream healthcare or in the complementary and alternative sectors. I recognise - and this applies to any medical intervention - that people rightly have concerns about safety, quality and regulation, and they have those concerns in some fields of complementary and alternative medicine.

I recognise too that there have been instances where certain alternative treatments or medicines have not come up to the high standards of safety and quality expected of a modern healthcare service. This is unacceptable. And I am committed to ensuring that, where standards fall and public health is placed at risk, the appropriate enforcement action will be robustly pursued – safeguarding public health is my over-riding concern.

So I welcome the work currently ongoing in relation to the regulation of a number of complementary therapy areas. Some CAM professions – chiropractic and osteopathy - are of course already regulated by statute. The ongoing work on regulation is important, not only in terms of underpinning patient safety, but also in providing reassurance to other healthcare practitioners that CAM is a safe and regulated alternative.

I think too that this is a most opportune time to be looking at the future role of complementary therapies in Northern Ireland. The health services here are about to undergo a major structural realignment. There will be a new emphasis on the setting, monitoring and reporting of standards across the health and personal social

services. The thrust towards quality and standards within the complementary therapies will leave that sector well prepared for life in the new climate in which our twenty-first century health and personal social services will operate.

This seminar is a modest yet highly significant first step along the road to greater integration of Complementary and Alternative Medicine within the Health Service.

In addressing the healthcare issues we face today it is important that we consider both the mainstream and complementary sectors. Both have much to offer. It is about increasing patient choice in how they are treated, yes, but it is about choice among safe, effective alternatives. The undoubted benefits of working together and the sharing of best practice will help to establish and maintain positive, effective and sustainable working relationships. All this will help ensure that we move forward in the best interest of patients, who are and must remain at the centre of everything we do.

I am committed to providing patients with the widest range of safe, accessible and effective means to get well, manage symptoms and stay healthy.

So that is why I am announcing today the creation of a £200,000 fund to support and facilitate GPs and alternative and complementary therapy providers to work together to offer health services for their locality. Through the fund, which will be administered by the Health Boards, GPs will be able to bid for resources to enable them to refer patients to a complementary therapist, where they feel the patient could benefit, they are confident that the practitioner provides a safe and effective service, and it is the patient's wish.

My Department will be in contact with the Boards very shortly about the operation of the fund, but it is my intention that this scheme should come into operation in January and the first wave should run for the calendar year 2007. We will use that year to monitor the scheme's operation and consider whether further categories of CAM practitioners should be included in the scheme in future years.

In broader terms, I look forward to hearing about the outcome of this seminar, for your work today will I hope help shed valuable light on the way ahead towards the goal of greater integration. **My aim is to see more choice for the patient, more choice in terms of the range of treatments and therapies that can be brought to bear in helping patients – all underpinned by the highest standards of safety and probity.**

This will of course take some time. And that is proper because I want to ensure that we move forward having listened carefully to you and other key stakeholders.

In the meantime I have taken steps which will I hope encourage further the adoption in the complementary therapies of core healthcare principles such as quality, safety and good practice. Over recent months my Department has been working very closely with the Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health - and I welcome representatives from the Foundation to today's event.

As a result of this close cooperation I am pleased to announce the launch of two new initiatives for Northern Ireland.

The first of these is the Integrated Health Awards scheme.

The awards scheme recognises the best examples of progressive healthcare projects that provide integrated services to patients across the UK. In 2005 the awards scheme attracted over 50 applicants in GB covering 200 projects including those involving hospices, musculoskeletal services, GP surgeries treating chronic conditions with CAM, mental health services using acupuncture, aromatherapy and massage, to name but a few.

I am keen to ensure that the good work being carried out in Northern Ireland covering a wide range of areas is recognised in the same manner as those services I have just mentioned in the GB context.

Publicity for the next round of awards including candidates from Northern Ireland will begin in January 2007 with the awards opening in March 2007. I would hope that when the winners are announced in December 2007 we will see the excellent work being carried out across Northern Ireland.



My Department is proud to be sponsoring the Northern Ireland category in the 2007 awards.

The second initiative is the Integrated Health Associates scheme. This is a national membership scheme for GPs, nurses, midwives, osteopaths, chiropractors, physiotherapists and regulated complementary practitioners.

Its purpose is to support health professionals deliver to patients the widest range of safe and effective means to get well, manage symptoms and stay healthy.

Ian Brownhill, Programmes Director for the Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health, will provide more detail on this initiative in his presentation this afternoon.

I am anxious too that we look more closely at ways in which complementary therapies can be explored as a means of effectively meeting local community needs.

I have therefore also asked officials to look at possible pilot projects using complementary therapies.

Discussions have been ongoing about possible pilot schemes with various groups, some of whom are here today, and I welcome their involvement in helping us to take this work forward. A number of options are being considered at this time and I would hope to begin the process of rolling out suitable pilots in the very near future.

I have cleared my diary so that I am able to stay to hear at first hand the presentations from our guest speakers this morning. In particular, I look forward to hearing from the practitioners how their own discipline can complement and enhance health care for patients.

Today's event is a wonderful opportunity to identify the barriers to greater integration of CAM in the mainstream health services and to come up with solutions to overcome these.

I will be using the information gathered today as a basis for helping to shape future policy development of CAM within the HPSS. I will of course ensure that you are kept up to date on important developments.

Finally, I would like to close by thanking those who will be giving presentations today, some of whom I know have made the journey from GB specifically to be here. The programme is very wide and interesting and I am sure you will find the information conveyed both interesting and informative. It is also interactive, so I urge you all to engage fully, especially in the workshops. Your contribution is extremely valuable.

I would also like to express my thanks to those of you from the CAM sector who have worked with departmental officials as part of the seminar planning group. I know too that the journey to this seminar began a long time ago and was largely as a result of the patience and persistence of Ken Mayne. The efforts of you all are greatly appreciated and I am grateful to you for giving so freely of your time.

Good luck for the rest of the day.

Thank you very much.

