



Complementary Health Care Policy

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Summary:	This policy guides medical practitioners in their practice of Complementary Health Care. It requires that the same high standards expected in the practice of medicine are applied in the practice of complementary health care by medical practitioners, and that patients are able to make informed decisions about their medical management.		
Applies to:	Registered Medical Practitioners practising in NSW		
Author:	Medical Council of NSW		
Owner:	Medical Council of NSW		
Related legislation, Awards, Policy and Agreements:	Previous versions: December 2004 and February 2010 Medical Board of Australia - Good Medical Practice: A Code of Conduct for Doctors in Australia		
Review date:	13 September 2016		

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PURPOSE

Complementary health care may cause harm to patients where the modality is unproved and communication with the patient inadequate. Practitioners must ensure they do not cause harm to their patients; direct, indirect or economic harm; in their practice of complementary health care.

DEFINITIONS

Direct harm	Harm which results in adverse patient outcome.
Indirect harm	Harm which results in a delay of appropriate treatment or in unreasonable expectations that discourage patients and their families from accepting and dealing effectively with their medical condition.
Economic harm	Harm as a result of expenditure on harmless, but inefficacious treatment or products.

BACKGROUND

Many practitioners offer complementary health care as part of the services available to their patients. For some practitioners it constitutes the bulk of their work. For others, a single modality such as acupuncture is available as an adjunct to their routine practice. Patients are likely to perceive them to be 'doctors who offer complementary health care' rather than 'complementary health practitioners who happen to be doctors'.

The term complementary health care covers a wide range of modalities. For the Council's purposes, the important distinction is between proved and unproved care; rather than between conventional medicine and complementary health care.

There is a paucity of scientific evidence about complementary health care. Some modalities can be shown to be beneficial. Others are potentially harmful.

MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS

Medical practitioners who offer complementary health care are accountable to the Medical Council of NSW for the full range of conventional and complementary health services that they provide.

The *Good Medical Practice: a Code of Conduct for doctors in Australia*, published by the Medical Board of Australia applies to all aspects of a registered medical practitioner's practice. Practitioners providing complementary health care must ensure that they;

- have demonstrable current knowledge and skills in their area of practice;
- act only in their patient's best interests;
- provide patients with sufficient information to allow them to make informed choices at all stages of their assessment, investigation and treatment;

- are honest in relation to financial and commercial matters. Section 139B of the National Law (NSW) also provides guidance in relation to pecuniary interest and accepting or offering a benefit for a referral or recommendation.
- keep medical records that comply with regulatory standards;
- assess patients by;
 - (a) taking a pertinent history and performing an appropriate physical examination, sufficient to make, or confirm, a generally recognised diagnosis, meeting the standard of practice generally expected of the profession;
 - (b) investigating when necessary, ensuring that patients are not denied access to generally recognised investigation modalities;
 - (c) reaching a diagnosis that reasonable medical practitioners would reach, supported by the information available;
- treat the patient by;
 - (a) advising them of any conventional treatment options, their risks, benefits and efficacy, as reflected by current knowledge;
 - (b) providing an honest account of the risks, benefits and efficacy of a recommended treatment.

A medical practitioner who recommends an unproved investigation or treatment rather than one with proved effectiveness must have broad professional support in doing so, as well as the patient's fully informed consent; or must be prepared to argue, with evidence, that the investigation or treatment is safe and that the patient will not be harmed in any way by withholding conventional medical management.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Executive Officer is responsible for ensuring that this policy is available to all registered medical practitioners, practising in NSW.

Medical practitioners who practise complementary health care must familiarise themselves with this policy and should take steps to make this policy available to their patients.