

Press release for immediate release

10th December 2018

UK acupuncture body urges Spain to drop plans to ban complementary medicine

The chief executive of the British Acupuncture Council has written to government ministers in Spain urging them to reconsider plans to ban complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) from health centres and universities.

Rob Strange MBE said he was dismayed to learn of the Spanish government's proposals and said he feared it was a knee-jerk reaction that would have far-reaching consequences.

In a statement last month Spanish science and health ministers said Protection of Health Against Pseudotherapies proposal would avoid the 'potential harmful effects' of such treatments when 'they are used as an alternative or a complement to treatment which themselves are based on proof and scientific rigour'.

It follows the death of 21-year-old Mario Rodriguez who died after dropping his hospital treatment for leukaemia in favour of a naturopath who said he could cure cancer with vitamins. The naturopath was subsequently acquitted of all charges against him.

Mr Strange argued there was a growing body of scientific evidence to support acupuncture as an effective treatment in a wide range of conditions and warned that a ban would not only be detrimental to patients in Spain but could have implications further afield.

He said: "As health systems around the world struggle with ageing populations, co-morbidities and an increase in complex chronic conditions acupuncture has a vital role to play in easing the pressure."

He highlighted a growing body of scientific evidence which shows that acupuncture is a highly effective treatment for a variety of conditions.

"Acupuncture is an extremely safe treatment which is most effective when delivered as part of an integrated healthcare system. Indeed, in those countries where it has been fully integrated the results are impressive.

"Of note, acupuncture is firmly established as being both clinically effective and superior to placebo for a variety of chronic pain conditions. It is recommended for headache relief and migraine prophylaxis by the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and for low back pain by various authorities worldwide, including the American College of Physicians. These are not bodies noted for their unorthodox or unscientific views, quite the opposite.

"The British Acupuncture Council has long-supported integration of acupuncture into the UK's national health system and as part of our efforts to see this happen we have produced a comprehensive research briefing showing the latest scientific research."

He urged Spanish politicians to take note of the research and consider reviewing their proposals to ban complementary and alternative medicine in health centres.

Overseas member of the BAAC, Olga Fedina, who practises in Valencia, said: “The government plan has been put together by several organisations, who have united against complementary medicine, without consulting large swathes of society that would be affected by its implementation

“The magazine ‘Discovery Shalud’ has published several investigations into the ‘sceptics’ associations, revealing serious conflicts of interest within their membership, as well as connections to patient associations, which in Spain tend to be private organisations sponsored by pharmaceutical companies.

“It is ironic to see on the list of the advisers for the governmental plan against ‘pseudosciences’ an organisation called Farmaciencia.”

The Spanish government was approached for a comment but had not responded at the time of writing, although it is understood they are considering whether acupuncture and homeopathy should now be included on the list.

Notes to editor

- The research briefing included with the BAAC’s letter can be found [here](#).
- The full letter is attached to this press release

For further information, case studies or interviews, please contact Katie Osborne on 07990 922615 or katie@osbornecomms.co.uk

For full list of British Acupuncture Council press releases visit the [newsroom](#).

About the BAAC

The British Acupuncture Council (BAAC) has a membership of nearly 3,000 professionally qualified acupuncturists. It is the UK's largest professional body for the practice of acupuncture. BAAC members practise a traditional, holistic style of acupuncture diagnosis and treatment based on a system developed and refined over 2,000 years. To achieve BAAC membership, practitioners must first undertake extensive training in traditional acupuncture (minimum three years full-time or part-time equivalent), which includes physiology, anatomy and other biomedical sciences appropriate to the practice of acupuncture.

Acupuncture and moxibustion

Acupuncture and moxibustion are forms of traditional Chinese medicine widely practised in China and also found in regions of south-east Asia, Europe and the Americas. The theories of acupuncture and moxibustion hold that the human body acts as a small universe connected by channels, and that by physically stimulating these channels the practitioner can promote the human body’s self-regulating functions and bring health to the patient. This stimulation involves the burning of moxa (mugwort) or the insertion of needles into points on these channels, with the aim to restore the body’s balance and

prevent and treat disease. In acupuncture, needles are selected according to the individual condition and used to puncture and stimulate the chosen points. Moxibustion is usually divided into direct and indirect moxibustion, in which either moxa cones are placed directly on points or moxa sticks are held and kept at some distance from the body surface to warm the chosen area. Moxa cones and sticks are made of dried mugwort leaves.

Traditional acupuncture

Traditional acupuncture as practised by members of the BAAC is based on Chinese medicine principles that have been developed, researched and refined for over 2,500 years. Traditional acupuncture is holistic, not focused on isolated symptoms. It regards pain and illness, whether physical or mental, to be a sign the whole body is out of balance. Western or medical acupuncture is a more recent development practised predominantly by doctors and physiotherapists, who use acupuncture techniques within their existing scope of practice on the basis of a western medical diagnosis. There is [a growing body of evidence](#) showing how effective acupuncture is in a range of conditions:

Why use a BAAC practitioner

Only British Acupuncture Council members belong to a Professional Standards Authority accredited register, providing professional guarantees of safety, education and continuing development (professionalstandards.org.uk)

Look for the letters MBAC after the name of your acupuncturist to ensure:

- ✓ extensive training – minimum three years degree level – with relevant western medicine including anatomy and physiology
- ✓ adherence to BAAC codes of safe practice and professional conduct
- ✓ compliance with current health and safety legislation
- ✓ full insurance cover for medical malpractice and public/products liability
- ✓ mandatory continuing professional development to keep knowledge and skills up to date
- ✓ postgraduate study of special interests such as pain management and acupuncture for children

Find a [BAAC registered acupuncturist](#) near you.

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez
Embassy of Spain
39 Chesham Place
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London
SW1X 8SB

12 December 2018

Dear Prime Minister

I was dismayed to read recently that the Spanish government is considering banning all alternative treatments, including acupuncture, from health centres.

On behalf of the British Acupuncture Council, I urge you to reconsider this decision based on a growing body of scientific evidence showing the effectiveness of acupuncture in a range of conditions.

We are concerned that a ban on complementary medicine in Spain could have far-reaching consequences not only in Spain but across Europe and the rest of the world.

We believe the proposed ban could be a reaction to two tragic deaths in Spain, which occurred after the patients in question chose to completely reject conventional medicine and opt only for homeopathic treatment.

Acupuncture is an extremely safe and effective treatment which, we believe, is best delivered as part of an integrated healthcare system. Indeed, in those countries where it has been fully integrated into national health systems the results are impressive.

The British Acupuncture Council has long-supported integration of acupuncture into the UK's national health system for the benefit of patients with a range of conditions and as part of our efforts to see that happen, our research manager has put together the attached briefing document.

I urge you to view the document which highlights the most recent research into acupuncture. Of note, acupuncture is firmly established as being both clinically effective and superior to placebo for a variety of chronic pain conditions (Vickers et al 2018). It is recommended for headache relief and migraine prophylaxis by the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, November 2016) and for low back pain by various authorities worldwide, including The American College of Physicians (Chou et al 2017). These are not bodies noted for their unorthodox or unscientific views, quite the opposite.

As health systems around the world struggle with ageing populations, co-morbidities and an increasing burden of chronic conditions, complementary treatments such as acupuncture have an important role to play in easing the pressure. Banning their use could have detrimental consequences for patients. We note that in the USA there is an increasing drive to evaluate and incorporate acupuncture into integrative health programmes as part of the response to the opioid crisis. Reducing drug adverse effects, be it opioid deaths or anti-inflammatory gastrointestinal symptoms, is a strong reason to include complementary medicine in the treatment options available to both doctors and patients.

The British Acupuncture Council (BAcC) is the UK's largest professional body for the practice of acupuncture and has a membership of nearly 3,000 professionally qualified acupuncturists.

Only BAcC members belong to a Professional Standards Authority accredited register, providing professional guarantees of safety, education and continuing development (www.professionalstandards.org.uk)

To gain membership of the BAcC members must:

- have undertaken extensive training – minimum of three years degree level – with relevant western medicine including anatomy and physiology
- adhere to BAcC codes of safe practice and professional conduct
- comply with current health and safety legislation
- have full insurance cover for medical malpractice and public/products liability
- undertake mandatory continuing professional development to keep knowledge and skills up to date

I urge you to consider adopting a similar system in Spain to allow fully qualified, professional acupuncturists to continue providing safe and effective treatment to their patients in health centres.

Yours sincerely

Rob Strange OBE
Chief Executive Officer
British Acupuncture Council