

Email to Mark Carroll m.carroll@gmul.ac.uk, in response to his "indicative curriculum for integrated health"

26 March 2008

Dear Dr Carroll

Don't worry about the delay -there was no great hurry. I hope you are recovered fully.

Thanks for the outline, and for the invitation to express an opinion

Actually I think it is almost impossible to express an opinion without knowing who is going to do the teaching. Consider a few of your headings

Nutrition, and dietary supplements

If you ask a "nutritional therapist" to give that, what you get will be totally different from what you get if you ask a proper nutritionist or dietitian to do it.

Similarly for *Stress and health*. You could get anything from a pendulum waver or laying on of hands to sensible advice

Spirituality and health is equally a minefield if it is given by the wrong person

The biggest minefield of all is clearly the CAM section

Complementary vs alternative, and range of CAM

Regulating and assessing CAM. This area is in chaos at the moment because of the proposal to "regulate" without any need to show effectiveness, and because even that is too much for many alternative people who are opting out right left and centre

Critical appraisal / evidence base for CAM, This is something that I have taught at UCL. The content would be very different though if you ask a CAM person to assess it, because most of them have no interest in evidence (if they had, they probably would change jobs)

Advising patients about CAM. Again the results you get depend entirely on who you ask to do it

The interesting thing about this area is that it shows more starkly than any other that I know of just how difficult it is to decide who is an appropriate "expert". When the DoH gave £1m or so for research in this area, they put the money in the hands of "expert" CAM people, who gave all the money to studies that answered none of the important questions -mostly just customer satisfaction surveys that generated results not greatly different from "my granny swears that homeopathy cured her cancer/headache/ . . . "

I guess the real problem is that almost all CAM people operate in a sort of parallel

universe from the rest of us, in which the terms truth and falsehood. or evidence, have meanings that are not recognisable by most of us. That is what makes dialogue so difficult. Here is one example. Peter Fisher, the Queen's Homeopathic Physician and clinical director of the Royal London homeopathic Hospital, is going to be opening the new herbal clinic at the RLHH on April 16th. (I suppose they are getting desperate for business now that so many PCTs have withdrawn funding for homeopathy). Now, homeopaths believe that the smaller the dose the bigger the effect. Herbalists believe exactly the opposite. So does Peter Fisher reverse his view about the slope of dose response curves for April 16th only? This is the sort of daft situation you get yourself into when you start believing impossible things.

I'll be really interested to hear how your course develops, and, in particular, who is going to be teaching about these topics. I'd be very grateful if you could keep me posted

Best regards
David Colquhoun