Regulate naturopaths: for the sake of public protection

The arrest of a Sydney naturopath for child abuse has reignited the debate on naturopathic registration.

“The circumstances of inappropriate treatment causing the near death of an infant are tragic”, said Professor Jon Adams, Convenor of the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) Special Interest Group on Complementary Medicine

“Unfortunately, this chain of events was not only preventable, it was predictable”

Naturopaths are currently one of Australia’s largest unregistered professions, with approximately one in ten Australians using their services.

In 2003 the Victorian government commissioned a report that formally assessed naturopathy against government risk-based criteria for regulation. The report was published in 2005, and recommended that naturopaths be statutorily regulated by the government.

Reports from the New South Wales and South Australian government also supported naturopathic registration.

“Every government report since 2000 looking into the regulatory requirements of naturopaths has said the same thing, the risks associated with this profession are significant enough to warrant registration” according to Michael Moore, CEO of the Public Health Association of Australia.

“It’s time to take these reports seriously and look at actually regulating naturopaths”

The Victorian government began the formal process of implementing registration for naturopaths. However, since the move to national registration meant that these developments were transferred to the national registration authority. They’ve been tabled at the national regulator ever since.

Some of the delays have also been created by the advent of ‘negative licensing’ legislation, in the form of a Statutory Code of Conduct, targeted at unregistered practitioners. However, an analysis of the New South Wales negative licensing model, published in the Journal of Law and Medicine, shows that it does not have the same level of public protection as statutory registration.

The 2006 New South Wales report recommending negative licensing even recommended that registration of naturopaths be considered, above and beyond negative licensing arrangements.

“Whilst the negative licensing legislation enacted by New South Wales offers a safety net that wasn’t there previously, it’s no replacement for real regulation” said Professor Adams.

“The government needs to extend regulation to new professions when required. Regulating naturopaths is an obvious start”

For further information/comment:

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