

Conventional versus Naturopathic Medicine ñ how to proceed from here?

As a professional outsider, there is really very little I could factually add to what I said on this subject at our last meeting, apart from a few methodological considerations.

We all seemed to agree that for what we call Naturopathic Medicine, in an acknowledged crisis created by an ongoing attack from Conventional Medicine and an unfriendly press, it is important to take more decisive, positive action; that we need discussions, a process of critical analysis in preparation of a powerful riposte.

It is a great idea to have these symposia as a forum where practical concepts can be discussed to overcome a mountain of common prejudices based on ignorance and the results of negative publicity against Complementary Medicine. Of course, it would not be sufficient just to meet as a group of like-minded professional friends who are grateful to have a chance to air their concerns or, though this may be of therapeutic value, to compare each others' woeful experiences in order to gain some consolation from the fact that others are equally frustrated.

We all agree that these Symposia should be used to prepare the ground for practical initiatives. In private discussions some of us have discussed, for example, that it may be useful to prepare a list of the most common arguments put forward by the enemies of Naturopathic Medicine. The list should be compiled by the people who are repeatedly confronted by those arguments, professional Naturopaths who have access to the sources, know their opponents by name and are able to quote from their statements.

Everyone of you should be asked to add some more quotes from statements by critics of Complementary Medicine for an almost comprehensive list of negative arguments. When this has been achieved, specific answers should be prepared to each point. Maybe a set of those negative-critical arguments (three or four?) could be distributed to two members of the group at a time, with the request to come up with specific answers to those arguments. These answers should be evaluated at the following meeting and then formulated in a language which ought to be as scientific and complex as necessary, but as uncomplicated and simple as possible.

In this way we will gain a set of standard answers to specific arguments against Complementary Medicine, a kind of manual which can be consulted whenever necessary by medical practitioners, can be distributed to medical

students, can be used as reference in press releases for interested media outlets and will generally help to replace the sometimes embarrassing uncertainty of practitioners when confronted with snappy, aggressive critical comments with the self-confidence of people who know their subject and are well-prepared to deal with such onslaughts.

Maybe in formulating the 'message' one should be aware of the respective addressees. The medical profession, which still believes to a large extent in conventional orthodox medicine, should be addressed in the scientific-medical jargon they understand best. Journalists, as a rule, prefer to receive well-packaged, relatively easily understandable messages, not too complicated, short, spicy bits of information, if possible handed over in a form which they can adopt straight-away for their scripted texts, without the need of much editing (which saves them precious time). The general public doesn't like to deal with messages which sound too scientific or too complex. But most ordinary people have had a negative experience with conventional doctors, or know about cases where orthodox medicine seemed to have no answers to existing medical problems. The majority of people nowadays seems to be ready to turn to Complimentary Medicine when they feel that orthodox medicine does not have an answer to their particular problem. They may just need a bit more encouragement and confirmation that there are in fact scientifically proven alternatives. For them the 'message' has to be communicated in a way that sounds strikingly evident, elementary and easily understandable without too much mental strain.

It is a blessing to have some journalists with us, who are committed to the cause of Naturopathic Medicine and know how to reach an audience on radio or television, or with written texts in newspapers and magazines. I hope that they will work out for themselves the most effective way of transporting the message.

As we know, enlightenment is a long and very slow process.