

6 July 2015

Dear Sir / Madam,

This letter is written in a personal capacity. The views expressed are my own, and should not be read as representing Cochrane policy.

I am aware that there is debate about whether or not herbal medicine practitioners should be registered, and that the absence of high quality evidence of benefit of herbal interventions has been cited as a reason why registration would not be appropriate.

I am entirely unqualified to comment on whether herbal practitioners should be registered, beyond the observation that registration as a process can fulfil other functions related to patient safety beyond the question of the efficacy or harm of treatments. It seems to be true and acknowledged that there is no strong evidence base to guide the use of herbal remedies. As someone who has been involved in the “evidence community” for some time, I note that this is not a unique situation. There are many fields of health care where the evidence base is flawed or insufficient to guide decision making. It is a basic tenet of evidence informed health care that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence (or no effect). Thus, the most we can conclude is that there is uncertainty. Decision makers then have to make judgements based on biological plausibility, the expertise and experience of the professional and the values and preferences of the patient or citizen.

I hope this is helpful

Best wishes,



Dr David Tovey FRCGP
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