

educator news march 2012

Friends of Science in Medicine declare war on alternative medicine degrees

By now, most of you would no doubt be aware of the call by the "Friends of Science in Medicine" (FSM) to ban the teaching of alternative medicine degrees in Australian universities. The FSM is a newly formed lobby group comprising around 400 medical practitioners and scientists. At the top of their blacklist of degree courses are chiropractic, osteopathy, Chinese Medicine, naturopathy and homeopathy.

Thus far, massage and myotherapy have largely escaped the censure of this group of eminent scientists, mainly because massage is considered to be fairly conventional. However, the arguments that the FSM have raised still have immediate relevance to us because they point to a bigger picture problem in the way healthcare is discussed, delivered and thought about in Australia.

Key to the FSM's central argument against alternative medicine degrees is the concept of evidence based practice. Their claims are grounded in the notion that conventional medicine is evidence based and alternative medicine isn't. This may well be an acceptable proposition if it was itself supported by evidence but the base claim is demonstrably fallacious. The Institute of Medicine (IOM), an independent, non-profit organisation that works outside government to provide unbiased healthcare information in the US, reports that well below half of medical care in the US is based on or supported by adequate evidence. Between 1993 and 2004, there was a more than 80 per cent increase in the number of medications prescribed to Americans. The IOM believes that this boom in pharmaceuticals is outpacing the rate at which information on their effectiveness can be generated.

Perhaps the FSM's call to ban alternative medicine degrees would also be less offensive if it was genuinely based on concerns about patient care and public safety. In turn, their assertion that alternative medicine is not only lacking in efficacy but also unsafe may be more palatable if conventional medicine was completely evidence based, had all the answers and didn't harm anyone. But this, too, is a fallacy.

The reason that the FSM's arguments are so deeply troubling and problematic is that they have little to do with patient care or effective healthcare policy. At the core of this push is power and commerce. But mostly it boils down to commerce. The FSM is yet another manifestation of a raging hegemony that feels threatened by its inability to utterly control patient choices ... this, in the context of a healthcare landscape that is already greatly weighted in favour of that raging hegemony. Conventional medical practice already controls the health spend in Australia at an institutional level but it seems that groups such as the FSM are now targeting the health dollar at the patient level by trying to limit the patient's right to choose. In other words, even the slightest whiff of the health consumer dollar going 'somewhere else' is considered to be a serious threat to the medical hegemony.

It's testament to the extreme nature of the FSM's views that even the Australian Medical Association has officially distanced themselves from the group. Make no mistake - the medical community is not united on this issue. But any attempt by groups such as the FSM to further undermine individual patient choice should be strongly resisted, regardless of how we might feel or think about some of the alternative practices that have come under their scrutiny.



PO Box 792
Newtown NSW 2042

T: 02 9517 9925
F: 02 9517 9952

www.amt.org.au
massage@amt.org.au

ABN 32 001 859 285
Established 1966

Research capacity workshop

Those of you who attended the National Massage Therapy Educators' Forum in October last year will recall Professor Jon Adams' inspiring session on research capacity building for the massage therapy profession. A number of exciting concepts were discussed during Jon's session, one of which was having him present a workshop on how to foster research literacy in students enrolled in massage therapy training.

Shortly, AMT will send out expressions of interest in a research literacy workshop presented by Jon. Please respond if you are interested in attending, as this will help us to determine the best location to hold the workshop. Jon has indicated that he is willing to travel so we will go wherever the greatest numbers and interest are. If there is sufficient interest, we may be able to hold two separate events. The intention is to run the workshop at cost.

In the meantime, here is an overview of the proposed session:

Bringing research alive: A Research Literacy Workshop for Massage Therapy Educators

This hands-on workshop will provide a broad overview of qualitative research methods as they are applicable to massage therapy and research teaching. Drawing upon a number of qualitative fieldwork methods and approaches, the workshop will be organised around a presentation of practical teaching techniques and props for effectively communicating such research ideas to VET college students. Professor Adams will provide insights from his 20-year career as a qualitative health researcher and educator to facilitate group work and interactive sessions with participants.

About Jon Adams:

Jon Adams is Professor of Public Health in the Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery and Health at the University of Technology, Sydney and currently holds an NHMRC Career Development Fellowship. Jon is Executive Director of the Network of Researchers in the Public Health of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NORPHCAM) - an international network dedicated to promoting and conducting rigorous public health and health services research and research capacity building in CAM, traditional medicine and integrative health care. Jon is also a Senior Fellow on the International Brisbane Initiative, Department of Primary Health Care, University of Oxford.

Jon leads a national research team examining CAM use amongst women from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health - the largest longitudinal cohort study of CAM use in the world to date, (n=>40,000 women). He is Associate Editor of two international peer-reviewed CAM journals, *Complementary Therapies in Medicine* and the *Journal of Acupuncture and Meridian Studies* and he sits on the International Editorial Advisory Board for the *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics* and the *Journal of Chinese Integrative Medicine*. Jon has produced over 135 peer reviewed academic publications since 2000 and has edited/co-edited 6 international CAM research books including Editor-in-Chief of the first International Reader in Traditional, Complementary and Integrative Medicine (Palgrave MacMillan, to be published early 2012).

Jon has extensive training in qualitative health research methods, health social science and mixed-method design. He is currently leading (CIA) 6 national and international CAM projects including two ARC-funded and two NHMRC-funded projects. Jon has been researching numerous aspects of CAM and conventional primary health care for over 10 years and has attracted in excess of AUD\$5.5 million in external funding since 2008.