

19 May 2017

Submission to the Charity Commission for England and Wales consultation on the use and promotion of complementary and alternative medicine: making decisions about charitable status

The Royal Society welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation into whether an organisation which uses or promotes complementary or alternative (CAM) therapies is a charity. The Society is the UK's national academy of science. It is a self-governing Fellowship of many of the world's most distinguished scientists working across a broad range of disciplines in academia, industry, charities and the public sector. The Society draws on the expertise of the Fellowship to provide independent and authoritative scientific advice to UK, European and international decision makers.

This consultation requests views on the evidential basis on which the effectiveness of CAM therapies and the benefit of promoting them can be assessed.

The Charity Commission defines CAM therapies as:

'Complementary' therapies are those which are offered alongside conventional medicine, and are not intended as a substitute for it.

'Alternative' therapies are offered separately from conventional medicine. They may be offered alongside or instead of conventional medicine.

The Royal Society does not support the therapeutic use of any product that has not been scientifically proven to be safe and effective. Conventional therapies and medicines must scientifically demonstrate their safety and efficacy. CAM therapies must be held to the same standards.

It is important that individuals can make an informed choice about whether they would like to use CAM therapies. They should be able to access clear information about the evidence behind their operation, and any risks involved in using them. People should not be put at risk through the belief that a treatment for which there is not a robust evidence base of safety and efficacy can provide an alternative to evidence based treatments.

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