

Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez
Embassy of Spain
39 Chesham Place
Belgravia
London
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12 December 2018

Dear Prime Minister

I was dismayed to read recently that the Spanish government is considering banning all alternative treatments, including acupuncture, from health centres.

On behalf of the British Acupuncture Council, I urge you to reconsider this decision based on a growing body of scientific evidence showing the effectiveness of acupuncture in a range of conditions.

We are concerned that a ban on complementary medicine in Spain could have far-reaching consequences not only in Spain but across Europe and the rest of the world.

We believe the proposed ban could be a reaction to two tragic deaths in Spain, which occurred after the patients in question chose to completely reject conventional medicine and opt only for homeopathic treatment.

Acupuncture is an extremely safe and effective treatment which, we believe, is best delivered as part of an integrated healthcare system. Indeed, in those countries where it has been fully integrated into national health systems the results are impressive.

The British Acupuncture Council has long-supported integration of acupuncture into the UK's national health system for the benefit of patients with a range of conditions and as part of our efforts to see that happen, our research manager has put together the attached briefing document.

I urge you to view the document which highlights the most recent research into acupuncture. Of note, acupuncture is firmly established as being both clinically effective and superior to placebo for a variety of chronic pain conditions (Vickers et al 2018). It is recommended for headache relief and migraine prophylaxis by the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, November 2016) and for low back pain by various authorities worldwide, including The American College of Physicians (Chou et al 2017). These are not bodies noted for their unorthodox or unscientific views, quite the opposite.

As health systems around the world struggle with ageing populations, co-morbidities and an increasing burden of chronic conditions, complementary treatments such as acupuncture have an important role to play in easing the pressure. Banning their use could have detrimental consequences for patients. We note that in the USA there is an increasing drive to evaluate and incorporate acupuncture into integrative health programmes as part of the response to the opioid crisis. Reducing drug adverse effects, be it opioid deaths or anti-inflammatory gastrointestinal symptoms, is a strong reason to include complementary medicine in the treatment options available to both doctors and patients.

The British Acupuncture Council (BAcC) is the UK's largest professional body for the practice of acupuncture and has a membership of nearly 3,000 professionally qualified acupuncturists.

Only BAcC members belong to a Professional Standards Authority accredited register, providing professional guarantees of safety, education and continuing development (www.professionalstandards.org.uk)

To gain membership of the BAcC members must:

- have undertaken extensive training – minimum of three years degree level – with relevant western medicine including anatomy and physiology
- adhere to BAcC codes of safe practice and professional conduct
- comply with current health and safety legislation
- have full insurance cover for medical malpractice and public/products liability
- undertake mandatory continuing professional development to keep knowledge and skills up to date

I urge you to consider adopting a similar system in Spain to allow fully qualified, professional acupuncturists to continue providing safe and effective treatment to their patients in health centres.

Yours sincerely

Rob Strange OBE
Chief Executive Officer
British Acupuncture Council