

## Press release 2 April 2009 – for immediate release

### Patient Choice in NHS Healthcare – an empty promise

**The new NHS Constitution**, published in January 2009, purports to offer patients ‘choice’ in the healthcare they receive. But for many people it fails to do so. For those who opt for complementary therapies, like homeopathy and acupuncture, the NHS will still effectively exclude their personal choices and preferences.

Marjorie Titchen, aged 91, who lives and still works in Bournemouth, asked her PCT to fund homeopathic treatment for her osteoarthritis. Yet even though her doctor supported her request, the Bournemouth and Poole PCT refused to fund it, and continue to deny her the right to choose her treatment option.

Yet the government and the NHS are making great claims about their new ‘patient choice’ agenda. The NHS Constitution states:

*“NHS services must reflect the needs and preferences of patients, their families and their carers. Patients ... will be involved in and consulted on all decisions about that care and treatment.”*

So why is it that Marjorie Titchen, and thousands like her, can be refused the treatment of their choice? She has had homeopathy before, and knows that it works for her, and that it is both safe and effective. She does not wish to take conventional drugs because she believes they are ineffective for her condition, and knows they can cause serious adverse reaction. Indeed, she adamantly refuses to take them. The reason behind Mrs Titchen’s dilemma can be found in one short sentence in the NHS constitution.

*“You have the right to drugs and treatment that have been recommended by NICE for use in the NHS, if your doctor says they are clinically appropriate for you”*

So these are the two obstacles. The first, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) is dominated by conventionally trained doctors, and people who have, or have had, close connections with the big, and powerful drugs companies. They know little about complementary medicine, in any of its forms. NICE does not employ anyone with homeopathic, or any other qualification in complementary medicine. So to ask NICE to recommend homeopathy is like asking a Ford salesman to sell you a Vauxhall car. It is just not going to happen!

- So what have NICE had to say about Mrs Titchen’s request?
- Do they advise against homeopathy in treating osteoarthritis? No.
- Does their guidance recommend it? No.

In fact, NICE guidance says nothing about homeopathic treatment for osteoarthritis! Moreover, NICE itself says that the decision whether to use homeopathy does not rest with them, but with the local PCT. In an email to Mrs Titchen (29<sup>th</sup> July 2008) NICE stated:

*“The decision on whether or not to fund your treatment is therefore one that must be made on a local level usually by your Primary Care Trust”.*

So it is local PCT’s who make the decision – another organisation that is usually dominated by people trained in, and committed to conventional medicine, and who know little about complementary medicine.

So how do they make their decision? Poole and Bournemouth PCT says that they have based their decision on NICE guidelines -even though NICE mentions nothing about homeopathic treatment for osteoarthritis! Since NICE says it is up to the local PCT, Mrs Titchen finds herself in a classic ‘catch 22’ situation.

What of the second arbiter of patient choice in the NHS Constitution, the doctor? Is Mrs Titchen’s request for homeopathy ‘clinically relevant?’ Her GP has said it is, and recommended homeopathy for her. But it has made no difference. The PCT refusal stands, and Mrs Titchen has had no medical treatment, of any sort, for nearly a year. And the NHS appears to be quite content to allow this situation to continue.

Yet GP support is not always given. Steve Scrutton, a homeopath in Northamptonshire, and Registrar of the Alliance of Registered Homeopaths, requested homeopathic treatment nearly 3 years ago.

*“It took me 11 months to overcome implacable opposition. I received no support from my GP, or the Northamptonshire PCT. The NHS has become a closed shop, a monopoly supplier fighting to ensure that only conventional treatment is available to patients. The NHS Constitution, as it stands, will not change that in any way. If a patient asks for homeopathic treatment in future the request will be denied - in most parts of the UK”.*

The NHS seems content to deny real patient choice. The NHS Constitution is not going to overturn the medical monopoly operating within the NHS. Although everyone pays for their medical treatment throughout their lives, when it comes to needing it, NHS bureaucrats believe that they know best, and have established an elaborate structure to enforce their prejudices. Patients, like Marjorie Titchen and Steve Scrutton, and indeed thousands more like them, are expected to accept conventional treatment – whether they like it or not – or go without. That, for them, is the only choice available.

**ENDS**

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## **THE ALLIANCE OF REGISTERED HOMEOPATHS INFORMATION FOR EDITORS**

The Alliance of Registered Homeopaths (ARH) is a UK professional organisation that supports and promotes a high standard of safe, effective homeopathic practice. It currently represents over 700 practising homeopaths.

We are committed to:

- ensuring that quality homeopathy is available to all who wish to use it
- raising public awareness of the potential of homeopathic treatment
- encouraging a high standard of education for homeopaths
- supporting the ongoing professional development of our Members
- encouraging co-operation between our Members and other healthcare professionals, for the benefit of patients
- engaging in research, publishing and other activities that enhance our understanding of homeopathy
- acting as an information base for the general public.