

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE OF CHINA SOCIETY
AUSTRALIA INC.

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Chair, Health Workforce Principal Committee
Megan Cahill
HWPC Secretariat
Level 12/120 Spencer St
MELBOURNE, Vic 3000
Attention: Practitioner Regulation Subcommittee

Dear Ms Cahill

I write to support the proposal for national registration for Chinese Medicine Practitioners, including Acupuncturists and Chinese Herbalists. The issue of registration has been an area of concern for several decades for members of the profession and professional associations. Indeed the National Chinese Medicine Liaison Committee made a submission to the previous federal Health Minister in 1995 to support national registration, with reference to the AHMAC criteria.

The issues continue to be of concern regarding safe practice and protection of the public. Training and education standards have been undergoing continuous improvements over the decades, however, since registration in Victoria, the public is assured of the minimum standards for those registered practitioners. The Chinese Medicine Registration Board of Victoria is able to address complaints and undertake prosecutions where appropriate.

There have always been challenges for people moving between states and particularly so now with registration only occurring in Victoria. There have been instances where practitioners in these circumstances have claimed ignorance of the law and have established practices using protected titles. As a practitioner member of the Chinese Medicine Registration Board of Victoria, CMRBV, I am well aware that quite a number of the complaints received by the Board have been about interstate practitioners registered with the Board. None of those dealt with by formal hearings continue to be registered in Victoria, but this does not apply to their own states where the public are not protected and they can still continue to practice without registration. The public need to be assured of uniform standards and where the practices exist for penetrating the skin for therapeutic purposes and prescribing herbal substances for therapeutic effect, the regulation of practitioners is essential.

The benefits of the new arrangements highlighted on your website are also crucial for Chinese Medicine practitioners who are registered in the divisions of Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine. Without national registration these areas fail to be addressed effectively and pose a risk to public health and safety. The extension of the registration system in Victoria to the national level is timely, practical and desirable for the reasons stated.

A single national registration and accreditation system for Chinese Medicine practitioners and Acupuncturists will:

- help health professionals move around the country more easily and reduce red tape
- provide greater safeguards for the public
- promote a more flexible, responsive and sustainable health workforce
- ensure improved minimum standards for education and practice
- provide legislative means for properly dealing with complaints and their resolution
- ensure minimum standards for advertising and infection control

In addition, the national registration for Chinese Medicine practitioners and Acupuncturists will extend the efficiency and the important benefits of the Victorian scheme. It will maintain a public national register for this profession that will ensure that a professional who has been banned from practising in one place is unable to practise elsewhere in Australia as they can at the present time. This is currently an unsatisfactory and potentially dangerous situation.

The above reasons conform with the AHMAC criteria and please also refer to the important detailed submission by the Chinese Medicine Registration Board of Victoria.

I attach a copy of the editorial I have recently written for the Chinese medicine journal, the *Lantern*, September, 2008.

We strongly urge that Chinese Medicine practitioners and Acupuncturists be included in the national registration for essential uniformity requirements for education, training, and practice standards (including advertising) and above all for public health and safety concerns.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully

Ms Glenys Savage

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Chinese Medicine in Australia – where are we now?

By Glenys Savage

In Chinese culture the number eight (ba) is significant, it's associated with 'expanding wealth'. I reflected on the fact that it is eight years since the introduction of the *Chinese Medicine Registration Act 2000* in the state of Victoria. This was a significant milestone in the development of traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in Australia. Victoria was the first jurisdiction outside of China to introduce statutory registration to protect the use of the titles *Acupuncturist*, *Chinese Medicine Practitioner*, *Chinese Herbal Medicine Practitioner* and other titles which could convey the impression of a person being registered.

As with many significant events, the registration evolved out of a long and political process which was due to the previous activities consistently conducted by dedicated practitioners who believed in the need for registration. It also required foresight and initiative by those in the Victorian health department and government who recognised the need and value of registration.

I have been privileged to have been involved with the Chinese Medicine Registration Board of Victoria, from its inception as a practitioner member. It has been challenging, rewarding and, at times, confronting.

What is the purpose of registration and what have been the implications of the legislation?' The primary aim of registration is to protect the public from 'unsafe' practitioners. The role of the Chinese Medicine Registration Board of Victoria (CMRBV), as established by the legislation, is to register suitably qualified practitioners, approve Chinese medicine courses, regulate advertising, set practice standards and deal with complaints. To date, the Board has registered over 1000 practitioners (most are from Victoria with a small number from other states) and it has received approximately 120 complaints about practitioners from members of the public. It has approved six courses of study.

Feedback from many practitioners, however, indicates that there are still many who don't realise the Board's role is defined by the legislation and as such it has certain limitations. After eight years the Board's role is still often confused with the role of other bodies such as professional associations. To say the Board should be doing more for practitioners, such as seeking benefits from the health funds, clearly indicates a lack of understanding from some in the profession as to the main purpose of registration. Some practitioners need to understand and appreciate the Board's primary regulatory role with regard to the protection of the public. It needs to be clearly differentiated as different from that of the professional associations which primarily serve the practitioners and also emphasise standards.

Another significant event was the recent passage by the Victorian government in 2005 of the new *Health Professions Registration Act* which encompasses all the registered health professions in Victoria under the same piece of legislation.

This legislation includes medical practitioners, nurses, pharmacists, psychologists, osteopaths, chiropractors, dental practitioners, optometrists, physiotherapists, podiatrists, medical radiation technologists and Chinese medicine practitioners. What is the importance of this historic legislation? Does it also reflect positively on the standing of our profession by default? The outcome does have this effect since it serves to improve education and practice standards and competence.

In Victoria then, the public is assured that Chinese medicine practitioners are:

- Suitably Qualified
- Competent and up to date
- Honest and trustworthy
- Subject to the Board's complaints review process.

Guidelines and Standards are:

- Developed by the profession
- Monitored and enforced consistently

Complaints are properly dealt with resulting in:

- Resolution
- Improved/corrected practices
- Maintenance and improvement of practice standards

Unqualified practitioners are dealt with by being:

- Unable to register
- Unable to use protected titles or claim to be qualified
- Prosecuted if they persist

There have been many developments in these last eight years, but I couldn't help also considering what had been occurring in the eight years prior to registration. In 1992, some senior members of the profession initiated the First Australian Conference on Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture. This was a significant event, being the first time that representatives from the different TCM associations and prominent TCM individuals came together to discuss issues facing Chinese medicine practitioners in Australia. There was general agreement about the need to foster dialogue and cohesion to promote issues for the profession.

As a result, the National TCM Liaison Committee was formed following the conference. It held a number of national meetings over the following years and established some important foundations. It focused on establishing National Guidelines for TCM education, advertising standards, ethics and professional standards of practice. It is interesting to note that the Committee also made a submission in 1995 to the then Federal Minister for

Health for national registration of Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture practitioners. The various practitioners and associations had worked hard to achieve these objectives.

Some individuals and associations hosted visits to Australia by Ministers for Health from China and its provinces and various meetings were arranged with Australian government ministers and members of the opposition. In Victoria in particular, some lobbyists were in the 'right place at the right time' taking up the cause and Ms Anne-Louise Carlton showed strong initiative and dedication in championing the cause for registration from within the Department of Human Services Victoria.

In 2008, we are now faced with the impending introduction of national registration in Australia for those professions which are currently registered in each state, including those mentioned above. Chinese Medicine may not be included in this first group of nationally registered professions as it is still only registered in the state of Victoria.

How close are we to the national registration we lobbied for long ago? What else do we need to do to ensure that we are a profession with national registration and a strong identity that the public can have confidence in?

The Federal Government is now calling for submissions and we need to make our case again for national registration for Chinese medicine. This is an important role for the professional associations.

It is also vital that practitioners maintain their membership of professional associations and indeed become active with them to help promote the profession and to address the requirements for national registration. Remember the phrase attributed to John F. Kennedy? Something to the effect: "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country!" Is there any similar application here?

Our profession is as strong as its practitioners, their education and training, their ethics and their practice standards. Statutory registration strengthens and protects the good reputation of the profession by ensuring proper accountability.

So, where are we now? Let's continue to work together and to seek inspiration from others to further develop our Chinese Medicine profession, our standing as an essential part of the healthcare system in Australia and indeed internationally and our desire to go on to bigger and better things. Research is a big part of it, as is peer interaction and communication. So, in order to move forward, let's keep the communication lines open between our registration boards, professional associations, institutions and also with other health professions and the different sectors of the community. Where will we be in another eight years? Will we be nationally registered or left behind? We can continue to ponder these issues, or take action.

Glenys Savage has been the Principal of the Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine Australia over the last 10 years. She is a registered practitioner in Victoria in both Acupuncture and Chinese Herbal Medicine with some 28 years experience in practice

and in teaching. She is currently in private practice and is now also working at the Southern School of Natural Therapies in Fitzroy, Melbourne. Glenys is one of the six practitioner members of the Chinese Medicine Registration Board of Victoria.