

## Questioning Quackery

Written by James Randi  
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From reader Nathan Grange in New Zealand comes news that there is concern in New Zealand about more extensive government spending on what's now called "Complementary and Alternative Medicine" [CAM], a situation that is currently being reviewed, along with appropriate concerns about the efficacy of the treatments. The Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) reports that it spent NZ\$37 million [US\$20 million] on CAM in the 2007-2008 year up from NZ\$18.4 million [US\$9.8 million] in 2003-2004. It was decided that there were "legitimate questions" about the effectiveness of some alternative treatments, and the issue is being looked at as part of a broader ACC review. In the past year, the ACC spent \$14 million [US\$7.4 million] on acupuncture alone, and NZ\$12.7 million [US\$6.8 million] on chiropractic treatment.

New Zealand doctors have wisely said that any treatment receiving government funding should be subject to the same rigorous standards as conventional medicine, though some alternative therapies for disability-allowance clients are approved by "registered medical practitioners," which includes chiropractors. One NZ MD, Dr. John Welch, said the idea of integrating conventional and complementary medicine was a

...fake proposition. There can only be one sort of medicine that's shown to be effective and works and should be publicly funded.

Even Ministry of Health chief adviser on integrative care Dr. David St. George said that the ministry was "exploring options" for integrating Cam into mainstream medicine but any suggestions of government funding were premature. He said:

There needs to be sufficient evidence of efficacy and effectiveness before a therapy can be considered for public funding.

This all sounds perfectly sensible, but rather trite and unneeded, to me. These requirements should be obvious, and an integral part of any decision about government funding. But New Zealand Register of Acupuncturists president Paddy McBride says that Chinese medicine could not be tested

...using the same limited controlled trials Western medicine would like us to use.

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May I ask, why not? Yes, the scientific method may be - to quacks - "limited," because it requires direct evidence, and the word "controlled" is repellent to these folks, but *those methods work!*