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Check against delivery!

The story of the Swiss referendum for Complementary and Alternative Medicine

By Dr Barbara Bichsel, National Vice President LMHI and ECH

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues and friends,

I would like to say some words about the referendum for CAM that enabled Switzerland to be the first country in Europe with an article about CAM in its constitution.

Complementary medicine has a long tradition in Switzerland let me just mention the name of Paracelsus who was born in Switzerland and worked there for some time or the famous Pastor Johann Künzle.

Concerning homoeopathy the first homoeopathic medical association was founded more than 150 years ago in 1856. And later on Switzerland played an important role for the „survival“ of homoeopathy in Europe; this was at the beginning of the 20th century, and here I have to mention the name of Dr Pierre Schmidt who was one of the founders of the LMHI in 1925.

But now let's over jump some decades: after 1970 the green movement or the „retour à la nature“- movement brought up an increasing demand for CAM in Switzerland. The medical doctors enlarged their skills mainly in Acupuncture, Homoeopathy, Anthroposophical Medicine, Neural therapy and Phytotherapy. After 1990 special diplomas were created for this above mentioned CAM disciplines; these certificates of capacity (Fähigkeitsausweis) as they are called were elaborated together with the particular CAM organisation for example the SVHA/SSMH/SSMO (Swiss Homoeopathic Medical Organisation) and the Swiss Medical Organisation FMH.

In 1999 the health minister decided that these 5 CAM-disciplines are reimbursed by the Compulsory Basic Health Insurance if practiced by a medical doctor. Before it had been reimbursed only by the private insurances. The admission to the Basic Health Insurance was only temporary and it was bound to the condition to proof the efficacy, the suitability and the economic viability of these methods. These studies needed to be done in 5 years.

The so called PEK study (Program of Evaluation of Complementary Medicine) had two parts:

- Literature research: this was done by an external professor elected by the government; as seen later on this meta-analysis (meta study) was done tendentious as showed by Lex Rutten, 2008; it led to the publication in the Lancet in 2006: Homoeopathy is not more than a placebo. The literature study done by the KIKOM (Kollegiale Instanz für Komplementärmedizin of the University of Berne) shows a different picture, in favour for homoeopathy concerning the efficacy and the suitability.
- Epidemiological study: comparison of different data's of CAM doctors and GPs without using CAM therapies; questionnaires were given to doctors and to patients.

This study brought interesting results, two of them I would like to mention: patients treated with CAM can cope better with their illness. And doctors treating with CAM have more severe chronically ill patients.

In 2005 before the studies had even be completed the new health minister threw the CAM therapies out of the Basic Health Insurance! This was the moment the referendum (called initiative in Switzerland) „future with CAM“ was started and it reached the needed signatures of 100.000 in a few months. The referendum was the fruit of teamwork between doctors and patients and manufacturers and non medical qualified therapists. After the discussion in the parliament we had to vote about the new constitutional article 118a changed only by omitting the word “extensive” in May 2009. The article says: „The Federal government and the cantons shall ensure that within the scope of their jurisdiction CAM is taken into consideration.“ (Bund und Kantone sorgen im Rahmen ihrer Zuständigkeiten für die Berücksichtigung der Komplementärmedizin.)

The requirements linked to the new article are:

- Promotion of cooperation between conventional and complementary medicine
- Readmission of complementary medical treatment to the Basic Health Insurance
- Integration of knowledge about CAM into university teaching and research
- Creation of national diplomas for non medical therapists
- Preservation of proven remedies

And the vote was in favour of the CAM: 67% yes!!

At the moment we have to work on the realisation of the requirements which is not easy but we have good support from politicians and from the recent founded „Dachverband Komplementärmedizin“ that unites again doctors, manufacturers of CAM remedies, patients, politicians, therapists.

At the end of April 2010 the medical CAM-organisations will submit their requests for the readmission to the Basic Health Insurance. For this request we had to make some recent literature research. And we also compared some interesting data's about the cost-effectiveness: the costs of GPs treating with CAM are around 25 % less than their colleagues using conventional medicine.

There have been discussions with the new health minister that started at the beginning of this year. He is much more open-minded towards CAM. He recommended making basic knowledge about CAM compulsory for all health professions!

There is still a lot to do until the requirements of the referendum are realised but we are on a good way.

The message I would like to give to you: this positive result was only possible thanks to the good teamwork of all people interested in CAM!

Dr. med. Barbara Bichsel, National Vice President LMHI and ECH
Praxisgemeinschaft ASCHERA, Hinterdorf 107A
CH-7220 Schiers, Switzerland
T: +41 81 328 24 04
F: +41 81 330 42 10
E: bichsel.praxis@hin.ch