

About the Essence Therapy Lead Body

Background

As long ago as 1987, the British Complementary Medical Association (BCMA) was created to look at CAM regulation. It was decided that the way forward was for each discipline to have a lead body, defined by The House of Lords in 2000 as a group which has a register of members, educational standards, a code of ethics and practice, a public complaints mechanism, and the capacity to represent the whole profession. The matter became more urgent in 2001-2 when The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee categorised CAM practices into those that were High Risk and required regulation (e.g. acupuncture) and those that were Medium Risk and Low Risk and could be allowed Voluntary Self-Regulation (VSR). It was always envisaged that lead bodies would require an overarching independent regulator which would protect the public by validating the status of registered therapists. Professional associations like the Institute for Complementary and Natural medicine (ICNM) and The Federation of Holistic Therapists (FHT) were already in existence and experienced in performing an in-house regulatory role.

However, in 2005, the Department of Health asked The Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health (FIH) to facilitate the development of a single federal 'umbrella regulator' for all the lead bodies. Twelve therapy disciplines formed lead bodies and participated in the process to develop a national federal regulatory body for practitioners of complementary and alternative medicine. The process split in 2007 with the majority of lead bodies favouring a standard regulatory structure over the radical 'lay-only' structure proposed by the Princes Foundation. The lead bodies for the largest disciplines went on to form the General Regulatory Council for Complementary Therapies (GRCCT) which became operational in September 2007. The bodies remaining formed the lay-only Complementary and National Health Council (CNHC) which became functional in 2009. After receiving a Department of Health grant of £900,000 the CNHC aimed to recruit 10,000 practitioners to their register in their first year. By September 2009 a total of only 500 registrations had been made in four disciplines: Massage Therapy, Nutritional Therapy, Aromatherapy and Reflexology. The recruitment aim was revised to 4,000 in Spring 2010. In that year, however, the FIH was closed after its accountant, George Gray, was imprisoned for the theft of £253,000 from the body. The CNHC was left in place but, by February 2011, despite eleven disciplines being eligible, the total number of registrants was still less than 4,000.

Compared with groups such as GRCCT which had in excess of 14,000 registrants, this performance was disappointing. In 2012 the government finally decided that the regulation of CAM practitioners should be monitored by the same body which monitors the function of statutory healthcare regulators, the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence (CHRE). The CHRE was re-named the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) in December 2012, is now self-funding and will hold the official launch of the Government approval route, Assured Voluntary Regulation (AVR) at the House of Commons in February 2013.

Forming a Lead Body for Essence Practitioners

Background

During 2009 the BFVEA committee were advised by Sue Lilly to put in place all the required aspects of voluntary self regulation. Some, such as a code of conduct and disciplinary procedure, already existed but a range of policies such as equal opportunities needed to be drafted and shared with members. At the 2010 AGM, the BFVEA Membership agreed to try to form a lead body and considered whether the association should explore linking with a regulatory body. GRCCT and CNHC were the first choices, but the latter became the favourite because of Government sponsorship. By the 2011 AGM the BFVEA had had preliminary discussions with CNHC and been told, literally, to 'go away for a couple of years'. Members were also concerned that this group had become 'tarred' by the financial scandal at the Prince's Trust, had not reached set

membership targets and had had government funding withdrawn. Members, therefore, chose to wait another year to see how the regulatory process would progress. At the 2012 AGM Members were even more unhappy with CNHC's performance and agreed to seek more advice on the options available. After this meeting regulation progressed with alarming speed. The first cohort of therapies (those in the High Risk category) was, with a few exceptions, finally dealt with; the PSA was being planned and 'Bach Flower Remedies' (*sic*) were listed for regulation in the second phase which would be underway in 2013. By September, the BFVEA committee was becoming seriously concerned that the 'essence world' still had no lead body and decided to try to form one quickly because:

1. without a lead body, no group holding an essence practitioner register, such as the BFVEA, would be able to enter the voluntary regulatory system.
2. although staying outside regulation was an option, the regulatory system was not going to go away. Indeed, it was becoming more organised and confident about dealing with CAM practices.
3. the essence world was soon going to be regulated and once regulations had been introduced they would not be able to be changed.
4. a lead body would allow us to set our own standards and control our own destiny during initial regulation.
5. regulation never decreases so additional recommendations were bound to be made in the future. A lead body would help prevent unwanted rules emerging and being enforced. Indeed, through it, we could challenge and/or contribute to any decisions being made.
6. an accredited lead body recognised by the PSA would be likely to become *the* mark of quality which would attract for its members clients, commissioners and employers.
7. unregistered practitioners would be likely to find it more difficult to gain insurance and employment in the future.

The process

September was a 'cruel month' for this project! Forming and maintaining an essence lead body on our own seemed impossible. The BFVEA *does* carry a professional register of essence practitioners, which is one of the requirements. However, we are only a small (though beautiful) professional group and there are rules on lead group 'capacity' which we did not seem to meet. Additionally the process is expensive, typically costing at least £10,000 p.a.

A little crushed but still determined, the committee decided to explore whether we could join the regulatory system through CNHC or GRCCT for which no cost was involved. Again, we reached a dead end. Connecting with CNHC was impossible as they now only work with therapies that already have National Occupational Standards (NOS) in place; and, 'catch 22', we could not link with GRCCT because they only deal with therapies that have a lead body!

These were huge obstacles but, just as we were becoming a little despondent, two angels were sent our way.... Paddy O'Hagan (via his wife, BFVEA Member Judith. Paddy has had vast experience of both being a regulator and being regulated) and Barry Tanner of GRCCT (via our resident Guardian Angel, Sue Lilly). After much advice and consultation it was agreed that the only way forward was for the BFVEA to link with the one other group holding a professional essence practitioner register, the Bach Centre, to form a lead body under the auspices of the GRCCT. October, therefore, began as a season of mists but eventually showed some signs of being 'mellowly fruitful'.

October and November included very agreeable negotiations with Stefan Ball, from the Bach Centre, but little progress, as they, at that time, felt it was probably best to stay outside the regulatory system. Thus, the BFVEA was forced to start exploring, again, the possibility of forming a lead body on its own. By the December 1st deadline Paddy, Barry and the committee had

worked out a way of doing this. It is important, however, to remember that a lead body exists for a whole profession. Our Association was, therefore, creating one for the *whole* essence world not just ourselves; and we did not want to miss the opportunity to bring everyone together in the venture if possible. We, therefore, asked GRCCT for another two months leeway and asked the Bach Centre to seek advice from Paddy and Barry on their options.

With our new deadline of 1st February 2013, January was understandably a nail biting month. Even on the morning of 30th we were asking the Bach Centre to seek advice from GRCCT, whilst reassuring them that, whatever they decided, we would look after their best interests as well as our own. It, therefore, felt like a bolt from the blue when, at 4.41pm (details enclosed for astrologer Members) Stefan phoned to say that the Bach Centre wanted to join us in forming the lead body. An historic moment!

After the celebrations, of course, there was much to do from finding a name to writing a Constitution...and all within a tiring, sleepless week. The name alone involved endless discussions but our final choice was Confederation of Registered Essence Practitioners (COREP, pronounced Co - as in toe - Rep). This has the advantages of meeting the Bach Centre's request to have 'confederation' in the title and no reference to 'vibrational' or 'therapist'; and it does sound like a group that regulators will recognise is co-operating together to represent their therapy. Additionally, as a first attempt at working together and compromising on our many, many differences, the experience has been surprisingly relaxed and pleasant, which bodes well for the future.

How will being part of COREP affect the BFVEA?

All the paperwork was emailed to GRCCT last Friday, Stefan and I accepted the invitation from GRCCT to become a lead body on Tuesday and by the time you read this COREP will be in place! So how will having such a big role in our therapy's lead body affect the BFVEA? Looking at COREP's 'aims' will be useful. These are:

- a. To act as a professional body for persons engaged in the practice of essence therapy.
- b. To support the involvement of essence practitioners in programmes of continuing professional development.
- c. To co-operate with national regulators on behalf of essence practitioners to confirm and maintain standards of safe, professional conduct within the therapy.
- d. To enable persons engaged in the practice of essence therapy, who have each agreed to abide by the Confederation's Code of Ethics and Practice, the opportunity of listing on a recognised National Register.
- e. To set guidelines for minimum content for essence practitioner training courses.
- f. To support efforts towards establishing National Occupational Standards (NOS) in essence therapy.
- g. To maintain the recognised Code of Ethics and Conduct of the Confederation of Registered Essence Practitioners and apply disciplinary procedures for anyone breaking the Code
- h. To act as a consultative body for essence therapy.

As you can see, the BFVEA and the Bach Centre, as individual organisations, are unaffected. They will control their own Constitutions, Codes of Conduct, Course Content, Registers, and so on. Together, however, as COREP, they will control and deal with all aspects of essence therapy standards, practice and regulation – something others would have to do if COREP did not exist.

Similarly, Memberships of the Bach Centre and the BFVEA will remain quite separate and different. However, I hope it feels good for each of you to be able to claim that you are a founder Member of the Essence Lead Body; and some of you are already realising the advantages of being able to be listed on the GRCCT National Register. More information on how to do this will follow from GRCCT. Meanwhile, let us all celebrate the opportunity COREP has provided for us all to work together as one, large essence family and to control our own destiny.

Jan Stewart, February 13th 2013