

## NEWS



## Liverpool CCG rethinks funding of homeopathy

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Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group has said that it is reconsidering whether to continue funding homeopathic treatments after a legal challenge from a pressure group that promotes rational thinking.

The Good Thinking Society, set up a year ago by the science writer Simon Singh, wrote to the group in February to highlight and challenge the group's decision to approve spending on homeopathic treatments. The society said that it believed the decision to be unlawful and contrary to the best interests of local patients.

Commenting on the group's agreement to reconsider its position on homeopathy, Singh said, "NHS spending is a major issue, especially in the run up to the election. Homeopathic treatments when paid for by the NHS are a waste of crucial resources that would be better spent on evidence based and effective treatments.

"We are delighted at the decision of the Liverpool CCG to rethink its misguided policy on spending money on homeopathy. We are confident that on looking at the evidence Liverpool CCG will decide not to spend any more on this ineffective treatment, and we hope that the few remaining CCGs who currently fund homeopathy will follow suit."

Liverpool CCG currently spends £30 000 a year on homeopathy.

Homeopathy has been condemned by the BMA, England's chief medical officer, the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, and the government's chief scientific adviser. Last month a large review in Australia concluded that homeopathy was not an effective treatment for any health condition.<sup>1</sup>

Over the past two decades prescriptions fulfilled in community pharmacies for homeopathic treatments on the NHS in England

have fallen by over 94%, and homeopathy hospitals have seen their funding reallocated.

Salima Budhani, of the law firm Bindmans LLP, who worked with the Good Thinking Society, said that the situation in Liverpool underlined the need for clinical commissioning groups to be transparent and accountable in their decision making. She said, "CCGs have legal obligations to properly consider relevant evidence, as well as the views of experts and residents, in deciding how precious NHS resources are to be spent.

"Our client has also called on the secretary of state for health to issue guidance on the funding of homeopathy on the NHS. Public statements by the secretary of state indicate that he does not support ongoing funding, yet he has so far declined to ask NICE [the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence] to do any work on this issue. The provision of such guidance would be of significant benefit to CCGs in justifying decisions to terminate funding."

In a statement Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group said, "Liverpool CCG currently resources a small homeopathy contract to the value of £30 000 per year that benefits a small number of patients in the city who choose to access NHS homeopathy care and treatment services. The CCG has agreed with the Good Thinking Society to carry out further engagement with patients and the general public to inform our future commissioning intentions for this service."

1 Pakpoor J. Homeopathy is not an effective treatment for any health condition, report concludes. *BMJ* 2015;350:h1478.

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