

AACMAC Melbourne 2014: Opening Speech by The Hon David Davis MP

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Australasian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Annual Conference (AACMAC Melbourne 2014) was held on 2 to 4 May 2014. A highlight of the opening ceremony on 3 May was a speech by The Hon. David Davis MP, Victoria Minister for Health. Here we publish the full text of the speech.

Thank you and can I begin by acknowledging a number of people: Richard Li, the President of the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association and indeed your conference President; Professor Charlie Xue, Chair of the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia and Head of the School of Health Sciences, RMIT University; Hoc Ku Huynh, Executive Committee of the World Federation of Chinese Medicine Societies; other representatives and in particular the President of the New Zealand Register of Acupuncturists, Ms Paddy McBride and other international guests.

Welcome to Victoria, I hope you have a great conference. I'm sure you will enjoy your stay, your visit and the hospitality that is available.

The program provides, I believe, an excellent opportunity for the profession to gather together, share their practice experience and understand the latest research in Chinese medicine.

This is a time for you to take stock, to sharpen your clinical practice, share insights and collaborate with your colleagues.

I am pleased to see a significant number of international guests on the program who I am sure also will add

additional weight and insight for you as clinicians.

I'd like to make a few observations about the role and importance of history.

In Victoria we are privileged to be the beneficiaries of several thousand years of clinical experience that underpins the practice of Chinese medicine.

As Chinese medicine practitioners, you have always known the importance of this history. It provides a very strong, solid foundation and guides your professional practice.

In the 150 or so years of Chinese medicine practice in Australia, the profession has made very big strides on its professionalisation journey.

The State of Victoria has been prominent in that history. As you are aware, Victoria was the first jurisdiction to register and regulate the profession of Chinese medicine outside of China.

It was the Liberal National Government led by Jeff Kennett that initiated those legislative reforms. First under Marie Tehan, then in 1999, under the leadership of my predecessor, The Honourable Rob Knowles as Health Minister, Mr Robert Doyle as Parliamentary Secretary, the then first Chinese Medicine Registration

Bill was introduced into the Victorian Parliament. Mr Robert Doyle now of course is Lord Mayor in Melbourne.

Along with the first Chinese Medicine Registration Board Victoria, these pioneers laid the groundwork for Chinese medicine to become a nationally registered health profession, alongside other professions such as medicine, nursing, dental and pharmacy.

Since then, Chinese medicine has been growing in strength and popularity.

It is now almost two years since the registration of the Chinese medicine profession was extended across the country, based largely on the Victorian model. While the profession has come a long way, there are significant challenges.

As you engage this weekend with your colleagues, I encourage you to keep at the forefront of your minds the characteristics of a strong and mature profession.

Obviously there are different views on this and you will have your own ideas. I propose to mention those characteristics that I consider to be important to your, or indeed, any profession.

First, a strong and mature profession is one where members have a commitment

to the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct.

Every patient has the right:

- to be given accurate and reliable information about their treatment options;
- to know exactly what is in any herbal formulae they have been prescribed;
- to have all those involved in their care collaborate and communicate effectively;
- to have a prompt and appropriate response if any adverse event occurs, and open disclosure when a mistake has been made;
- to be referred on to other practitioners where appropriate.

All these are important steps, important prerequisites for professional practice.

All practitioners need to engage actively in self-reflection and to challenge any colleague who is at risk of stepping over a line.

Practitioners also need strong commitment to continuing professional development. Your presence here today is just one very strong indication that you value highly the sharing of professional knowledge and the engagement with your colleagues.

Second, a strong and mature profession is one that recognises the importance of research, and strong research that supports clinical practice. While the evidence base for Chinese medicine is growing progressively, there is certainly significant room for further effort.

I encourage those of you who are not engaged currently in research to think about how you might contribute to the body of knowledge about Chinese medicine.

You can do this through formal and informal collaborations with your research colleagues within universities

and other research centres. A strong research community means, in my view, a strong and vibrant profession and a profession committed to its future and the future of its patients.

Third, a strong and mature profession is one that presents a unified and authoritative voice to governments, educators, regulators and the community.

When there are multiple professional associations that claim to represent the views of the profession, this can dilute your voice and the profession's capacity to represent its members' interests effectively.

A united front is not only the most effective way to pursue your profession's objectives; it is also the best defence against the slings and arrows that may come in the profession's direction from time to time.

I would urge you to regularly refresh your efforts to explore common ground with other professional associations and to continue to seek out opportunities for collaboration.

Fourth, a strong and mature profession understands and respects the authority of its registration board. It values the difficult job that Board members do on behalf of the government and the community.

It is not the job of the registration Board to promote the interests of the profession – that is the role of the AACMA. The Board is there to protect the community, and every member of the Board has committed to this objective above all others.

At times Board members have to make very difficult decisions, decisions which must fairly balance the rights and interests of the community and those of an individual practitioner.

There will always be some who think the Board has got it wrong, that's natural.

Even so, it is important to maintain a respectful debate, and to use the various avenues that are available to you under the law to review Board decisions.

Fifth, a strong and mature profession has respectful and collaborative relationships with other professions. I understand that strong inter-professional links are not always easy to achieve or maintain.

This is especially so when the paradigm that underpins Chinese medicine practice is not generally well understood, that is a challenge for the profession. You may also be aggrieved when you see other professions increasingly moving into what you might consider to be areas of knowledge and specialty that you have worked in.

To deal with these challenges constructively and professionally, my final ingredient of a mature profession is one whose members place the patient at the centre of each and every decision.

If you focus on your own practice and always place your patients' interests above your own, you will continue to build a strong and very respected place for Chinese medicine care within the Australian health care system.

To finish, I trust that you are all aware that Health Ministers have initiated the first full review of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme. This includes a review of the National Boards including Chinese medicine, so the 14 professional groups that are registered of which Chinese medicine is one.

The terms of reference for the Review have been published and are available on the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council's website. The Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council of which I am a member has appointed Mr Kim Snowball as the Independent Reviewer.

Victoria is well-placed to respond to the national review. This is because,

during 2012–13, at the behest of this Government, the Victorian Parliament's Legislative Council Committee chaired by my colleague and Parliamentary Secretary for Health, Georgie Crozier, conducted its own Inquiry into the performance of AHPRA.

The Parliamentary Committee held public hearings and took submissions. It provided an opportunity for those with an interest to have their say about how AHPRA and the National Boards are working.

On the issue of national registration and accreditation, I have placed on

the public record on a number of occasions my reservations towards the idea that national approaches are necessarily always better. As I alluded to earlier, Victoria has a proud history of maturity and sophistication when it comes to health professions and practice. And so, it is critical that any national arrangements do not result in a diminution of Victorian standards but rather, are implemented in a manner that recognises and supports state-specific contexts.

The Parliamentary Committee's report was published recently and is available on the Victorian Parliament's website. I am

currently considering the Government's response to its recommendations.

I urge your organisation to take a lead role in the national review, to strongly represent the views of the Chinese medicine profession and its patients and to use this opportunity to have your say about how you think the scheme is performing, and how it may be improved to benefit both the Victorian and broader Australian community and importantly, to your valued and respected profession.

Thank you.