



100 Million EU Citizens Already Benefit from Complementary Medicine

- **Vigorously growing demand for alternative methods of treatment**
- **Companies request funds from the 7th EU Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development**
- **Demand for law for EU-wide approval of alternative medications**

100 million EU citizens already count on alternative medicine, whether it be acupuncture, homeopathy or anthroposophic methods of healing. And the trend is growing considerably. Annual growth rates in the industry are up to ten percent, estimates Max Daeye, President of the European Coalition on Homeopathic and Anthroposophic Medicinal Products (ECHAMP).

Complementary medicine is not only backed by consumers but by the World Health Organization (WHO) as well: in view of the increasing demand, WHO member states have been called upon to issue directives in order to be able to maximally benefit from the advantages of alternative healing methods. “Nothing has happened in Europe for years,” criticised Ton Nicolai, President of the European Committee for Homeopathy (ECH).

Yet consumers refuse to be misguided by critical studies – and numerous experts in the area of classical medicine admit that they are absolutely right, said Stefan N. Willich, head of the Berlin-based Institute for Social Medicine, Epidemiology and Health Economics at the renowned Charité University Hospital. He spoke at the European Health Forum Gastein, where a workshop on the topic of complementary medicine was held and attended by numerous high-profile people. On behalf of the German “Techniker-Krankenkasse” and “Innungskrankenkasse Hamburg” Willich tested the effectiveness of acupuncture and homeopathic supplementary treatments on patients with chronic problems. The result was astonishing in its clarity because, reports Willich, “the overwhelming majority of patients who received conventional treatment combined with homeopathy or acupuncture exhibited significantly better therapeutic success.”

Willich emphasised the necessity of further, large-scale studies in order to obtain new knowledge concerning which areas complementary medicine can be implemented in most effectively and whether complementary therapies can relieve the burden on health care systems in the long term as a result of durable success in treatment.

According to Willich, in no way should the significance of complementary medicine in the scope of a modern, efficient health care system be underestimated: “Patients must approach applied treatment methods positively if they want to achieve optimal success in healing. And in this regard, complementary medicine has become indispensable among a large segment of the population.”

An obstacle to further development, however, is the small amount of research in alternative medicine. “Homeopathic medications are relatively cheap and the financial power of the homeopathic industry very limited,” states Daege of ECHAMP. As a result, the extensive research conducted by the companies operating in the field is barely feasible financially. “It is absolutely necessary that complementary medicine is accorded a commensurate place in the 7th EU Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development.

***Further information or abstracts from the lectures at the
Risk / Benefits Communication workshop:***

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