

Protecting the public and instilling confidence

UK Healers (UKH) is a respected national umbrella body for numerous healing organisations. It is dedicated to setting and maintaining the highest standards of training and ethical practice. In this exclusive interview, its chair Colin Baker speaks to PN editor Sue Farrow about the early days of the organisation, accreditation and regulation of healers, and explains why he believes UKH is at a crossroads.

When and for what reason(s) was UK Healers set up?

In 2000 the House of Lords' Science and Technology Select Committee produced a paper (the Sixth Report) that called for a number of complementary health therapies to introduce voluntary self-regulation for their practitioners. Healing was on this list.

What is now known as UK Healers started off in 2000 as the 'Healing Movement Lead Body Development Group', its aim being to do the work to prepare the ground for the self-regulation sought in the Lords' report. At first, five of the largest healer membership organisations formed the group but as time went by it changed, with one organisation leaving and many more becoming involved.

The main activity of this group was to produce and agree, through consultation, a set of minimum standards for the training, etc that should apply to all healers. These are now known as the UK Healers' Standards and were first published in 2003.

Along with the publishing of these standards, UK Healers was launched in 2003 with the objective of becoming the regulatory body for spiritual healers in the UK, for the protection of the public.

What are the official objects and aims of the organisation?

These are currently stated as:

"UK Healers is established to be the voluntary self-regulation body for Spiritual Healer practitioners in the United Kingdom. It regulates healers by administering standards and a practitioner register of members of accredited healing organisations intended to:

- provide safe, appropriate and effective practice of Spiritual Healing by Registered UK Healers.
- protect the public and instil public confidence.
- ensure that any complaints against Registered Healers



are dealt with thoroughly."

However, much has happened in the intervening years and we are at a stage where we need to re-evaluate what we should be doing in the future.

The UKH website lists the names of 16 member organisations, many of which offer information on their own websites about courses they run, their content and duration. What conditions must any organisation or course meet in order to gain UKH accreditation?

To be formally associated with UK Healers an organisation must be accredited as meeting the UK Healers'

Standards. All of these membership organisations have had to prove that they meet the standards, which include the training required, the independent assessment process, the complaints and disciplinary procedures and continuing professional development.

Other than meeting the UK Healers' Standards, organisations are free to do as they wish.

What kind of investigation/examination does UKH undertake of any aspiring body or course?

To gain accreditation, an organisation has to submit, and have accepted by UK Healers, documentation covering all aspects of the standards relating to membership, assessment, the two years of training needed, code of conduct, complaints procedures, disciplinary procedures and continuing professional development.

Several of the member organisations have their own insurance and other arrangements. What has attracted these seemingly self-sufficient bodies to join UKH?

There are many advantages for organisations to associate with UK Healers.

Representatives of the organisations meet regularly to talk about common issues and to further the work of UK Healers. All of these people are responsible and caring and have the best interest of the healing

community at heart.

The established standards for training, code of conduct, etc are well considered and practical, and are intended to protect the patients of healers.

An organisation's representative gets support and help from others present who are like-minded individuals.

At one time the membership organisations associated with UK Healers represented over 75 per cent of all known healers, all meeting the standards. This has enabled Balens, the insurance brokers, to negotiate a very preferential insurance rate and cover for healers. Without the 'community' that UK Healers has created this would not have been possible.

Organisations advise the names of their qualified healers to UK Healers. This allows members of the public to be confident that any healer they intend to use will be well trained to an agreed standard and, more importantly, is not one of the rogue healers that we unfortunately hear about from time to time.

There is co-operation between the organisations to promote healing as a reputable therapy.

UK Healers has helped to create National Occupational Standards (NOS) for Spiritual Healing. The government organisations typically use the NOS to determine what knowledge, understanding and competencies are required for anyone to work in one of their agencies, e.g. the NHS.

There are two independent regulatory bodies for complementary therapists: The Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC) and the General Regulatory Council for Complementary Therapists (GRCCT). Both of these require that their registrants meet the relevant NOS. Healers belonging to organisations associated with UK Healers may register with either of these regulators.

Various member organisations make references to UKH and its Code of Conduct but a visitor to UKH's own website cannot access the Code of Conduct directly. Is there a reason why UKH does not make that very important information public on its own site?

The UK Healers' Code of Conduct can be accessed directly from the UK Healers' website. There is a button on the left of the home screen. The page that this accesses then allows the user to download a PDF containing the Code of Conduct.

We are currently reviewing all of our standards that have previously only been available in booklet form. It was decided at our latest meeting that it would be good to make all of the new standards available through our website once they have been agreed.

We also need to let more people know about the benefits that healing can bring and our desire to collaborate with other organisations outside of UKH for the common good.

There has been much talk of official regulation of healers over the years, but it seems that a greater degree of regulation may shortly



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come about. What is the reaction of UKH to the proposed changes, and how, if at all, might they affect the role of UKH as a national umbrella body?

Much has changed in the area of regulation since 2000. The main impetus for this was the aftermath of the activities of Dr Harold Shipman. There are statutory regulatory bodies for professions like doctors and nurses.

These are different from voluntary self-regulatory bodies such as those for complementary therapies. But as changes were made to improve regulation and independence within statutory regulatory bodies, these have had a spin-off into voluntary self-regulation.

I guess that the government cannot afford another Shipman so the changes continue. There were further announcements last year where the government's 'regulator of regulators' is to extend its powers from just examining statutory regulators to include voluntary self-regulatory bodies.

I mentioned earlier that there are two independent regulators of complementary therapists: CNHC and GRCCT. There has, to date, been no indication that the government wants anything more than voluntary self-regulation for healers.

UK Healers have been making changes to their original objectives to meet the emerging requirements and are now at the stage where they need to re-evaluate their overall role and make whatever changes they need to meet any new objectives.

We are at a crossroads. UK Healers has achieved a great deal since 2000. It has brought commonality to the high standards of training, etc to the majority of healers in the UK.

It has provided a way for the public to check that they can have confidence in their healer.

We are still awaiting details of the latest government announcements and we will decide what to do in the best interests of the healing community we represent and for the protection of the public.



• For further details on the UK Healers, see their advert on page 7.