Title of Project: Assessing complementary medicine safety and efficacy related information available on the internet for consumers

(FOR Code/s): 1104

Supervisor: Dr Anthony Good Contact: a.good@uws.edu.au
Co-supervisor
Location of Project: Campbelltown

Project Background
The use of complementary medicine is widespread in Australia, with reports of up to 80% of Australians consuming a complementary medicine each year [1]. However, the quality of information available on the internet for consumers is questionable, which may pose significant and serious public health concerns. People in the Australian community have the right to be appropriately informed about the safety and efficacy of complementary medicines. The lack of focus on details of efficacy and safety of complementary medicines in the health system leads those who wish to be well informed of the complementary medicines they are taking to seek information elsewhere, which in the information age if most commonly the internet. Health information on the internet ranges from personal accounts of illnesses, consumer discussion groups, chat forums, and advertisements related to products.

Aim of Study:
This project aims to conduct a preliminary analysis of health regarding the safety and efficacy of complementary medicines available on the internet.

Methods
Criteria for determining quality of information related to various dimensions such as content, type, scientific merit, ethical aspects with a particular focus on safety and efficacy information will be developed from the literature and applied to analyse the first 50 websites that appear using 'complementary medicine' as a search term for Australian websites. Information gathered from these websites will be compared with published data for those complementary medicines which appear most often on the first 50 websites identified above.

Ethics Application Requirements:
No HREC approval required as survey work based on published data and not interview data

Key References:
Bensoussan, A, Meyers, S Towards a safer choice the practice of traditional Chinese medicine in Australia. 1996, Campbelltown, N.S.W.Faculty of Health, University of Western Sydney Macarthur. 476