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When “Healing Hands” Start Grasping

Esoteric breast massage claims “to heal many issues such as painful periods, polycystic ovaries, endometriosis, bloating/water retention, and pre-menstrual and menopausal symptoms”.

Much adverse publicity has descended recently on a “New Age” healing service based in Lismore, NSW, called Universal Medicine. Serge Benhayon, a one-time tennis coach with no health care qualifications, leads the organisation.

Perhaps the most sensational therapeutic modality on offer is referred to as “esoteric breast massage”. Even though Benhayon’s claims about esoteric breast massage have been examined by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), the Health Care Complaints Commission (NSW) and the Australian Medical Registration Board, Universal Medicine is continuing its unacceptable practices unfettered by any sanctions from regulatory bodies.

What is on offer? Let’s look at a description of the benefits of esoteric breast massage from Benhayon’s website (www.esoteric-breast-massage.com).

The Esoteric Breast Massage assists to heal many issues such as painful periods, polycystic ovaries, endometriosis, bloating/water retention, and pre-menstrual and menopausal symptoms.

A woman benefits from a series of EBM’s to help clear the imposed ills that come from herself and from those who impose on her. How many EBM’s are beneficial will depend on how much is in the breasts to be cleared. We recommend at least 10 to 12 to start with, but you may feel it is right to have more. It is, after all, a choice to bring the whole of you back to yourself. At the end of the first series of EBM’s, we recommend having them every 2 to 3 months

to maintain clear breasts or whenever a woman feels impulsed [sic] to clear more from her breasts as it has been clearly shown that there are many layers to get to and eventually clear.

It continues:

... an EBM cream ... has been esoterically designed by Serge Benhayon, the founder of this healing process that is available for women to purchase from their EBM practitioner after their fourth massage... It is a self-nurturing gesture to apply this unique cream to your own breasts as the EBM cream has been specifically designed to lovingly support this self-nurturing process.

As if those ludicrous claims were not enough...

Period pain comes from the lack of stillness and self-nurturing and the ill-quality of spleen energy. The EBM thus plays a vital role in the process of healing this widespread ill condition in women.

On and on it goes. When the TGA was informed that numerous herbal preparations and “EBM cream” were being sold but had not been “listed” with the TGA, it sprang into action, ordering Universal Medicine to list their products and remove therapeutic claims from their promotion of the products. This Universal Medicine did, and the TGA patted them on the back for complying. Proof of efficacy was never mentioned! Esoteric Breast Cream is still available from that website.

One former patient became alarmed when Benhayon told her he was having a “psychic consultation with her ovaries”. She complained about Universal Medicine to the NSW Health Care Complaints Commission – an organisation charged with overseeing a code of practice for unregistered health practitioners – but was told they could not act as they had not received a report of harm to any patient! This same patient noted with alarm that six local doctors – registered medical practitioners – were publically supporting the modalities used by Universal Medicine and actually referring patients to the service.

She then complained to both the Health Care Complaints Commission and the National Medical Registration Board, asking if it was not unacceptable for doctors to be giving credibility to this nonsense. She was told that individual doctors can express their personal opinions and, for the Board to act, patient harm as a consequence of their support would need to be documented. The doctors in question would not even receive a reprimand of any kind.

Adequate consumer protection from misleading and often fraudulent practices remains disappointingly inadequate, both at the state and national level. In Australia in 2013, vulnerable patients deserve much better than that.

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