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by Eleanor Limprecht

Medical acupuncturists have attacked calls to regulate Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), claiming it will give those practising unorthodox medicine the same status as GPs.

At present Victoria is the only state in Australia that regulates TCM, but the issue is now being examined by a NSW Parliamentary inquiry into the potential regulation of the practice.

The president of the Australian Medical Acupuncture College, Dr David Mitchell, said: "TCM is a mix of techniques, including acupuncture, Chinese herbs, pulse diagnosis, external examination of the skin, eyes and tongue, and palpation of the abdomen. We believe that this is inadequate and inappropriate as a measure of primary diagnosis."

TCM practitioners are currently not required to fulfil any level of training, but industry guidelines recommend a four-year bachelor degree program.

TCM bodies are strongly in favour of regulation because it allows them to enforce a standard of education and registration. Under the current system, they cannot regulate unqualified practitioners outside Victoria.

A medical acupuncturist must be a trained doctor. Having completed a one-year, part-time training course in acupuncture and passed an exam, they can then access higher MBS rebates than a GP without such training.

But Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association CEO Ms Judy James said the training provided to most medical acupuncturists was inadequate for safe and competent practice. She added: "There is no reliable scientific basis for the term medical acupuncture, which, in our view, is simply acupuncture performed by a medical practitioner without necessarily having the underpinning TCM theoretical and diagnostic understanding."

We believe to be effective as an acupuncturist you have to understand the TCM framework. You can't take the TCM theory out of acupuncture and just put the needles in based on some unproven theories.