

Press release

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Scientists slam EU consumer fraud

European scientists and skeptics express concern over health risk via homeopathy and other unproven remedies

Health and consumer protection are top priorities for the EU, with Directives condemning unfair commercial practices, misleading advertising and aggressive sales methods. However, the EU and a number of member states have inexplicably exempted some practices from following objective rules. The requirement for proven efficacy was dropped for a special group of products: those labeled "homeopathic" or "anthroposophic".

The European Council of Skeptical Organisations (ECSO) objects strongly to this capitulation by the European Union to vested commercial interests that undermine both fairness and health safety. "This special treatment and blatant promotion of organized scientific misconduct poses a serious threat to health in Europe", says ECSO Chairman Amardeo Sarma. "Plain water and sugar pills dipped in plain water are being sold as medication under different names with clinical indications", says Willem Betz, ECSO expert on alternative medicine, professor emeritus and previous Head of Department of General Medicine of the Free University of Brussels. "Nobody can distinguish such magic potions from plain solvent or sugar, or these products from each other. We offer a prize of 10,000 € to anyone who can."

ECSO calls on the EU and its member states to:

- live up to its claim to promote fairness and protect its citizens by preventing consumer and health fraud,
- ensure equal and high standards in testing medical products *without exceptions* and *without regard to special lobby groups*, and
- insist on adhering to the existing high international scientific standards of evidence-based medicine

A first step would be to review and repeal Directives that grant homeopathic products the status of medication without providing good scientific evidence as is required for all real medication.

ECSO is also supporting the 10:23 campaign. In over 30 locations in 16 European countries, concerned citizens will demonstrate on 5th and 6th February 2011 that highly diluted homeopathic products are liquids or pills that do not contain any trace of the labeled ingredient. The world-wide 10:23 campaign shows that citizens are aware of the inadequacy of homeopathy and reject the continued promotion of homeopathy and other types of useless, fraudulent or harmful medication. "It is time that politicians and administrators come to their senses", says Sarma.

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Background Information

EU Directives

EU Directives 65/65/EEC, 75/319/EEC and 89/341/EEC strictly regulate medicine. EU Directive 2005/29/EC defines and condemns unfair commercial practices of all kinds, misleading advertising and aggressive sales methods. In the EU Directive 92/73/EEC, the requirement for proven efficacy was dropped for a special group of products: homeopathic and anthroposophic medicinal products.

ECSO – The European Council of Skeptical Organizations

The European Council of Skeptical Organisations (ECSO) was founded on September 25, 1994, in Oostende, Belgium. Its goals are to protect the public from the consequences of unproven therapies and claims, investigate so-called paranormal claims and promote science and critical thinking. ECSO represents 14 European, and mostly national organisations with similar goals.

The 10:23 campaign

The 10:23 Campaign (<http://www.1023.org.uk>) aims to raise awareness about the reality of homeopathy. Its goals are to show how homeopathy can be shown not to work, that homeopathy is often nothing but plain water or sugar by taking an "overdose" of homeopathy, why homeopaths' claims are impossible, and why anyone should care.

Challenges to show that homeopathy works

Several European and international skeptical organisations offer prizes ranging from 10,000 € to 1 million US-Dollars to anyone who can prove a paranormal claim. Most organisations include homeopathic claims in this challenge, namely: to prove that homeopathy works, to distinguish highly diluted homeopathic products from the corresponding pure substrate of sugar or liquid, or to distinguish two highly diluted homeopathic products from each other.

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