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Paul Macgregor is an historian who is Curator at the Museum of Chinese Australian History in Melbourne, and Associate Editor of *Diversity*. He curated the exhibition, "Other Healers: 150 Years of Complementary Medicine in Victoria", now on display at the Medical History Museum at The University of Melbourne.

by PAUL MACGREGOR

"Put Yourself in Nature's Hands"

A History of Complementary Medicine in Victoria



Homoeopathic kit produced by Martin & Co, Melbourne Homoeopathic Pharmacy, circa 1870s. Courtesy collection of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (Vic).

The last 20 years has seen an increase in popular interest in complementary healthcare in Australia; however, many of the disciplines which are part of the contemporary complementary medicine field have been practiced in Victoria since the middle of the 19th century. While support and patronage for these modalities has varied enormously over the last 150 years, generally speaking there has always been a thread of practice carried on.



NON-ABORIGINAL SETTLEMENT in Victoria commenced in the mid-19th century, a time of great migrations and interaction of cultures around the world, and a time of great fertility of invention and ideas, particularly in Europe and European-settled countries. What is now regarded as orthodox western medicine was only one of many forms of health care which were used in European societies and their colonies. Orthodox medicine was limited in its approach and success rate with the treatment of illnesses and infectious diseases, and had no great claim to be the treatment option of first choice.

Undoubtedly the 19th and early 20th centuries saw great advances in western medicine, with the development of the germ theory and vaccinations, the definition and analysis of physiology and pathology and a greater understanding of the biochemistry of life. However, until the discovery of sulphur based drugs and antibiotics in the 1930s and 1940s, there was little that western medicine could do to alter the natural course of a disease in the human body once someone got sick. For most of the 19th century, medical doctors used a wide variety of substances which were traditionally regarded as being of healing power, derived from plant, animal and mineral sources. Many were toxic or at least quite harmful, and often were prescribed in heavy doses, with the theory that rugged treatment was required to do battle with illness.

Regulation by government was minimal. Statutory registration for medical practitioners commenced with the *Medical Practitioners Act of 1862*, but this only prevented other healers from calling themselves "medical practitioners"; it did not prevent them from practicing health care by other names. Undoubtedly a wide range of charlatans, or else sincere people with inadequate training, were able to ply their trade. However, doubtful practitioners existed within the medical fraternity as well, and the majority of non-medical practitioners were probably genuine in their attitudes, had quality training, and had a considerable degree of effectiveness in the treatments they offered.

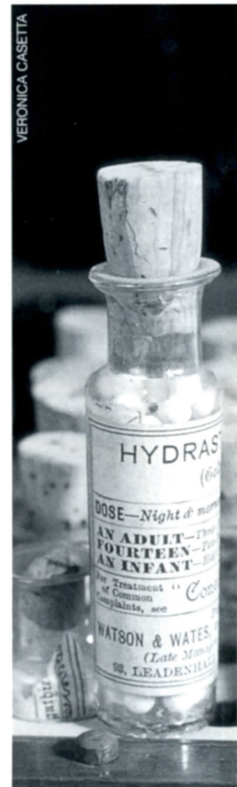
Being part of the British Empire tied Australia into other British colonies in Asia. Many Asians came to Australia, particularly Chinese for the goldrushes, but also Indians, Malays and Afghans.

Two great healing traditions of Europe and China thus came to be on offer simultaneously in Victoria. European herbalism and traditional Chinese medicine are practices whose history go back thousands of years. Their knowledge systems are

based on extensive case histories developed through the clinical work of generations of practitioners.

The ferment of ideas in the late 18th and 19th centuries led many individuals to also develop new ways to treat illness and foster health. A broad range of innovative theories and treatments were promulgated, but only a few have survived to the present day, in particular: homoeopathy, naturopathy, chiropractic and osteopathy. Australia's connections with Europe and America meant that these new ideas came to Victoria fairly quickly.

Until the late 19th century, orthodox medicine was limited in its approach and success rate with the treatment of illnesses and infectious diseases. As a consequence, many individuals sought new ways to treat illness and foster health.



Homoeopathic pillule bottle from the Martin & Co kit, circa 1870s.

Books, pamphlets and magazines promoting various natural and non-medical healthcare disciplines were produced in Australia and also imported from Britain and America. These were often published by individual practitioners, and were designed to promote their disciplines in general, as well as their own practice, and to provide self-treatment advice for their readers. Consulting a practitioner, of any discipline (medical or otherwise), was usually an expensive business. Hospitals were smaller, usually run by charitable organisations and

lacking in significant government support. Until the advent of hygiene improvements in the 1880s, they were also more likely to kill rather than cure. Where possible, most people tried to treat themselves, thus there was a brisk business in over-the-counter remedies and mail-order dispensing.

EUROPEAN HERBALISM

The use of herbs in the treatment of illness was a major feature of European health care from classical antiquity until the 19th century. As the 19th century progressed, pharmacists increasingly focussed on defining, extracting and purifying the active constituents of plants. In contrast, many herbalists believed that medicinal plants should be used in their natural state, and preferred to use fresh or dried herbs, or tinctures and oils extracted from the plant.

By the 1890s there were over 20 European herbalists in Melbourne, and the Australasian Union of Herbalists had been formed. Their numbers continued to expand; by 1925 there were 42 in Victoria, but then numbers slowly contracted from then on. Most were from Britain, a few from Germany and elsewhere. One of the most well-known and long-lasting was John Broadbent & Sons, whose practice, at 109 Bourke St, flourished from at least the 1880s until at least the 1930s. Broadbent had prominent signage on his shopfront, declaring "Botanic Laboratory: All Herbs Guaranteed Pure, Fresh, and True to Nature. Importers of Medical Herbs from Every Part of the Globe: Herbs, Roots, Barks, Seeds, Blossoms. Herbal Remedies for All Diseases: No Family Should Be Without Them. Deeds Not Words."

Interestingly, of all the treatment modalities on offer in the 19th century, European herbalism was remarkable in having a significant number of women as practitioners. In 1910 for instance, 7 of the 21 European herbalists advertising themselves in the Sands & McDougall Trade & Professional Directory in

Melbourne were women.

A number of herbalists published books. John Broadbent wrote *The Australian Botanic Guide*, which provided lists of herbs and the illnesses for which they were effective. Danish H.P. Rasmussen, of Sydney, published *The Natural Doctor* in 1891. Other herbalist texts available in Victoria at the time were *The New Family Herbal and Botanic Physician*, by Matthew Robinson, and *The New Zealand Family Herb Doctor: A Book on the Botanic Eclectic System of Medicine*, by James Neil.

The main disciplines practiced historically in Victoria were European herbalism, traditional Chinese medicine, homoeopathy and naturopathy; chiropractic, osteopathy and massage.

CHINESE HERBALISM

As early as the goldrush era, Chinese medical practitioners were common figures in town and country life. In 1867 there were 50 Chinese practitioners scattered over the Victorian goldfields. While there is some evidence for the use of acupuncture by these early Victorian Chinese, the use of herbs appears to have been their primary modality, and so, like their European counterparts, they adopted the term "herbalist".

Chinese practitioners in the 19th century primarily trained under an apprenticeship system. Wong Chock-Son, for instance, advertised in the *Ballarat Courier* in 1911 as being a "fully qualified medical practitioner...only the purest herbs used...practising in China seven years with leading doctors." College training in traditional Chinese medicine only began in 1924 with the founding of the Canton Medical College in 1924.

From the 1870s to the 1930s, there were between 20 and 50 Chinese herbalists practicing in Victoria at any one time. Chinese generally outnumbered European herbalists in the country, whereas in Melbourne the situation was reversed. For instance in 1910, there were 16 Chinese practicing in the country compared with 6 Europeans; in the city, there were 21 Europeans compared with 10 Chinese. With the advent of the motor car, many Chinese herbalists acquired vehicles to enable them to travel between country towns. For example, Alf Lam Sun saw patients in Kerang, Wycheproof, Birchip, Echuca, Kyabram and Kyneton, and also went regularly from Bendigo to Melbourne.

HOMOEOPATHY

Homoeopathy was developed by the German physician and experimental chemist Samuel Hahnemann in the late 18th century. Disillusioned with the harshness and the uncertainty of contemporary orthodox practice, he discovered that



Plant illustrations and title page from Robinson's "The New Family Herbal and Botanic Physician" (mid-19th c.). Courtesy private collection of Dr Richard Travers.



certain substances, which in large doses created symptoms of illness in a healthy person, could, in infinitesimal proportions, induce a cure in a person with a disease of similar symptoms.

Homoeopathy was adopted by many doctors in Europe, and was in all likelihood first brought to the Australian colonies by German, French and English settlers who brought with them their own homoeopathic medical "kits" consisting of a chest of remedies and a manual for their use. Also available from any of the numerous homoeopathic pharmacies in the colonies, homoeopathic kits came in a variety of shapes and sizes, from small pocket-sized manuals with a few essential remedies through to large chests accompanied by several thick volumes.

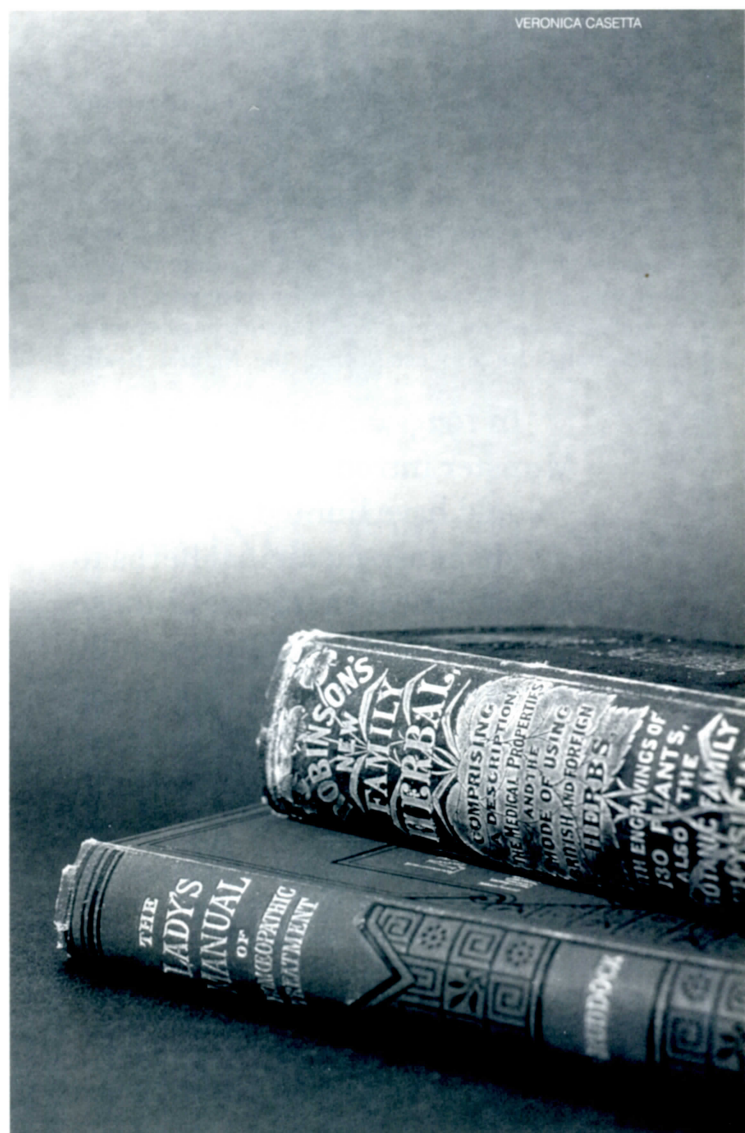
Many homoeopathic physicians were registered medical practitioners, with the same training and qualifications as their orthodox rivals, who had discovered the homoeopathic system after their orthodox training had been completed. There was a Homoeopathic Medical Society of Victoria, headed by Dr Robert Ray. Homoeopathic journals in Australia were *Homoeopathic Progress in Australia*, which was edited by Dr Johannes Gunst, and which ran for a year (1870-71), *Notes on Homoeopathy*, edited by Tasmanian homoeopath E. Atherton (1870-1871), and the *Tasmanian Homoeopathic Medical Journal* which was published from Hobart for several years around the turn of the century.

In 1869 the Melbourne Homoeopathic Dispensary was founded at 155 Collins Street Melbourne by Drs Gunst, Ray and J.P. Teague, with the support of the Bishop of Melbourne and the Reverend John Turner. The Dispensary proved successful, and in 1876 was developed into a hospital, temporarily located at Spring Street. In 1882, the foundation stone for the Melbourne Homoeopathic Hospital, in St Kilda Road, was laid by the State Governor, the Marquis of Normanby. The hospital, which flourished until the 1920s, was treating over 14,000 patients a year by 1915.

The Melbourne Homoeopathic Hospital, which flourished from 1876 to 1934, was one of the city's major hospitals, treating over 14,000 patients per year by 1915.

NATUROPATHY, CHIROPRACTIC, OSTEOPATHY & MASSAGE

Coined as a term by John Steel in New York in 1895, "naturopathy", or "nature cure", was then promulgated by Benjamin Lust, who defined it as both a way of life and a concept of healing that employed various natural means of treating human infirmities and disease states. In Australia, the promotion of "natural" treatment was common in the 19th century. However, the use of "naturopathy", and its conscious alignment with the developing profession in America and Britain, arose in the 1920s and 1930s. The natural



Robinson's "New Family Herbal and Botanic Physician" (mid-19th c.) and Ruddock's "The Lady's Manual of Homoeopathic Treatment in the Various Derangements Incident to Her Sex" (1882). Courtesy private collection of Dr Richard Travers.

health movement also gave rise to a number of popular health magazines, such as *Health and Physical Culture* (1930s-1940s) published in Sydney by Alfred Britton, and the *National Magazine of Health* (1910s-1920s), the official organ of the Victorian Massage Society and The Food Education Society, and published by George Philpots, a dentist, and Alfred Peters, a masseur.

The early naturopathic movement in Victoria focussed on nutrition, nutritional supplements, herbs, exercise, massage, chiropractic and osteopathy. Vitamins had been discovered by biochemists from 1912 to the 1930s, and the first to be synthesised was Vitamin C in 1932. Their discovery fuelled a major interest in health food in the 1920s, and spurred the development of nutritional supplements as a treatment option. Chiropractic and osteopathy are two manipulative therapies developed in America in the 19th century, by Daniel Palmer in 1895, and Dr Andrew Still in the 1870s, respectively. In Melbourne, Blackney Chiropractic and Natural Cure Institute, of 441 St Kilda Rd, advertised in *Health and Physical*

Culture in 1930 as offering "Chiropractic, and all Natural Treatments".

Frederick Roberts, born in Hobart in 1892, went to England and studied at the London School of Natural Therapies. By 1929 he had moved to Melbourne, where he established the Roberts' Naturopathic Institute, a rest home, a Health Academy and a factory for the manufacture of a large range of herbal products and nutritional supplements. In the 1930s he went on to establish branches in all states of Australia. He also established the Natural Health

In 1925, the Victorian Health Minister introduced a bill which would have limited the right to dispense medicinal herbs to pharmaceutical chemists. Chinese and European herbalists successfully campaigned against this, gaining 6,000 signatures on a petition opposing the bill.

Society, a health and fitness club which organised health camps and retreats around Australia. However, by 1946, all his clinics had closed, except in Melbourne and Brisbane, and he concentrated his energies in the 1950s and 1960s on teaching chiropractic and osteopathy. In 1959 the Roberts' Health Academy title changed to the Chiropractic and Osteopathy College of Australia. Eventually, with registration of chiropractors and osteopaths in Victoria in 1978, this college amalgamated with Phillip Institute of TAFE, and is now part of the RMIT School of Health Sciences.

Maurice Blackmore emigrated to Australia from London, with a diploma from the British Naturopathic College, and opened a naturopathic rest home in Queensland in 1934. He was concerned to place naturopathy on a scientific basis and established a laboratory for the manufacture of minerals and vitamins. He particularly focussed on refining the twelve tissue salts (ferrum phosphate, silica, calcium flouride, etc.) pioneered by Schussler in Europe in the 1850s. Schussler considered that it was a lack of molecular balance of these salts within the tissues which caused most disease. Blackmore pioneered a range of tissue salts called celloids which were manufactured in such a way as to give increased numbers of molecules in each salt but with the ability for direct absorption into the cells like homoeopathic medications.

Practitioners who started to use the celloids found that they had results which greatly enlarged their practices. One was Alf Jacka who originally trained under Cyril Flower. In the mid 1950s, he began to pursue a career in natural therapies and opened a clinic in East Melbourne. He also developed a number of country clinics which included Ballarat, Bendigo, Euroa and Geelong. During the 1950s-1970s Jacka had the largest naturopathic practice in Victoria and possibly within the whole of Australia. Blackmore encouraged Jacka to start a college in Melbourne, and in 1961 the Southern School of Natural Therapies opened. In subsequent years the college enlarged the curriculum, teaching expertise, and administration. In 1998 it became the first college in Victoria to offer a degree course in natural therapies.

ALTERNATIVE OR COMPLEMENTARY?

There is a remarkable similarity in the health philosophies of natural therapists from the 1850s to the present day. Generally they have seen themselves as practicing a more "natural" form of health care, "gentler", less invasive, or with less risk of harmful side-effects, than some of the treatments used by orthodox medicine. There has been a continual emphasis on the view that the human body has innate capacities to heal itself, if restored to a "healthy balance".

At most times there has been an uneasy truce between orthodox medical practitioners and complementary therapists. The rising influence of science in orthodox medicine led many doctors to pillory alternative practitioners as lacking scientific rigour and a well-grounded philosophy. However, the fact that many homoeopaths in the 19th century were qualified medical practitioners made it more difficult for the orthodox doctors to dismiss the homoeopaths' medical claims with the type of public authority that they could exercise over others, such as herbalists. There have also been attempts by doctors to gain legislation to restrict the right of other practitioners to operate. The greatest of these was a bill put by the Minister of Health, Dr Argyle, in 1925, before the Victorian parliament, aiming to restrict the right to dispense herbs to pharmaceutical chemists. It was withdrawn after Chinese and European herbalists organised an effective campaign and gained over 6,000 signatures for a petition opposing the bill.

There have also been attempts by natural therapists to gain state registration. The earliest was made by Chinese herbalists in the 1870s. F.G. Roberts attempted to gain registration for chiropractors in the 1960s. The first registration of natural therapists

1. First premises of the Homoeopathic Hospital, at 7 Spring St, Melbourne. Opened in 1876, it was vacated in 1886 after the new building in St Kilda Rd was opened. 2. Advertisement from "The Medical Telephone", The Homoeopathic Pharmacy, Hobart, 1883. 3. Dr Johanness Werner Gunst, pioneer of homoeopathy in Melbourne, and co-founder of the Homoeopathic Hospital, as caricatured in "The Weekly Times", 26 September 1874. 4. Alfred Peter's "Massage: Its History, its curative uses, and its practical results", 1890. 5. Chinese herbalist Harry Pang, Warracknabeal, 1930s. 6. Advertisement in the Christmas Supplement for "The Ballarat Courier", 1911. 7. Invoice from L. Quong, of Melbourne, 1920s. 8. Illustration for a homoeopathic kit from "The Medical Telephone", The Homoeopathic Pharmacy, Hobart, 1883. 9. Cover of Paul Koonin's "Health Cocktails", Sydney, 1941. 10. Exterior of the Melbourne Homoeopathic Hospital, 1920.





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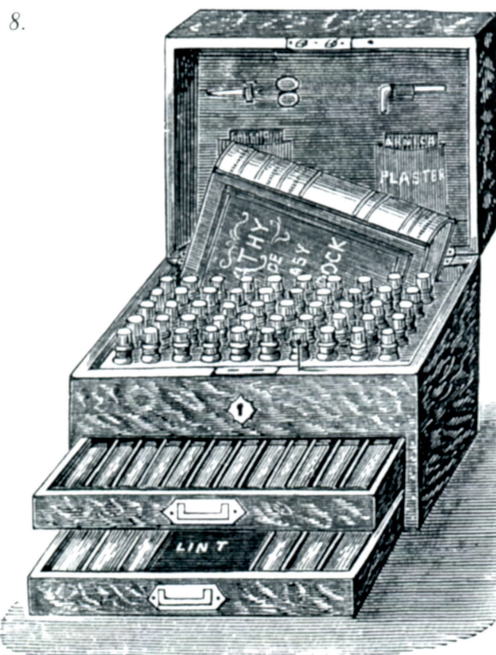
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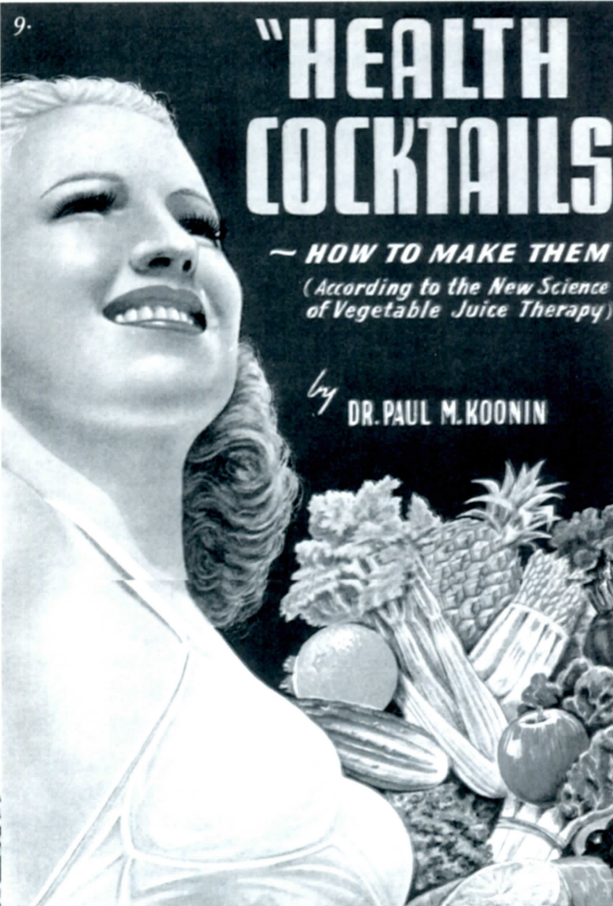


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Adult female ward, Homoeopathic Hospital, circa 1920. Courtesy Monash Medical Centre Historical Collection.

arose out of a parliamentary enquiry in 1975, into chiropractic, osteopathy and naturopathy, which recommended that the first two be registered, but that naturopathy had not yet reached a suitable standard of education.

While the various forms of natural therapies flourished until the 1930s, major developments in the prevention, treatment and cure of illnesses by orthodox medicine in the 1930s and 1940s had a devastating effect on the popularity of alternative practitioners. The advent of sulphur-based drugs and antibiotics in orthodox medicine's pharmacopoeia, in particular, provided faster and apparently more effective treatment than the slower methods of herbalists, homoeopaths and naturopaths. The development of a wide variety of vaccines for many infectious diseases, particularly TB and polio,

received major publicity worldwide, further shoring up public confidence in scientific medicine.

The Melbourne Homoeopathic Hospital had a decreasing number of homoeopaths on its staff in the 1920s, and in 1934 it changed its name to Prince Henry's, becoming a completely orthodox hospital. With Chinese herbalists also, World War II, and then immigration and trade restrictions between mainland China and Australia in the early decades of the People's Republic after 1949, disrupted supplies of herbs and stopped replacement of those who retired. From the 1940s to the 1960s, it is believed there was only one practicing homoeopath in Australia, in Sydney.

However, the total faith of the mid-20th century in the ability of western medicine to develop miracle cures was shattered in the 1960s when some of the new drugs were found to have serious side-effects, the most famous case being thalidomide. There was also concern by many people about the reductionist view of medical science, where disease and treatment was increasingly regarded as a series of independent biochemical problems, and the health and care of the whole person - mind and spirit as well as the whole body as a system - were not being sufficiently factored into research, diagnosis or treatment.

The natural health movement consequently experienced a major revival, allied with increasing concern about environmental pollution and contaminated food. The resumption of migration and trade between Australia and China in the 1970s also brought a new wave of professionally trained



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Frederick G. Roberts, a pioneer of naturopathy, in 1939, and the logo of his business, reproduced from his booklet, "Your Health Reborn through Your Own Curative Power". Courtesy private collection of Dr Richard Travers.



traditional Chinese medicine practitioners and heralded a resurgence of patronage of their discipline in Australia. The market for complementary health care is now large enough to support a wide variety of private training colleges, ensuring the growth of the number of practitioners of a wide variety of disciplines. Increasingly, complementary health care practitioners are also applying scientific investigation to their philosophies and treatments, with substantial results. Many medical doctors and researchers are also adopting complementary medicine modalities, and involving them in their research programs.

The recent approval by the Victorian parliament of a system of registration for traditional Chinese medicine is likely to be followed by moves by other disciplines to seek registration. As in the past, this has not come without opposition from a range of medical organisations. However, the tide of support for complementary medicine is now perhaps too great for a slump such as in the 1930s-1960s to occur again. The issue for the future is perhaps whether complementary health care disciplines maintain their independence and integrity, or whether they are absorbed into a transformed orthodox medical system.

I am indebted to Tao Bak for the material on the history of homoeopathy in Australia. I am also grateful to Dr Richard Travers for access to his superb historical collection of Australian medical and healthcare texts.

Readers are invited to contact *Diversity* if they have any knowledge of practitioners or disciplines as practiced historically in Australia. Of particular interest would be letters, case notes, brochures, pamphlets and any other documents, as well as photographs, advertisements, illustrations, bottles, equipment or any other objects.

The exhibition "Other Healers: A History of Complementary Medicine in Victoria", is on display at the Medical History Museum, Brownless Biomedical Library, The University of Melbourne, from 17 May to 3 November 2000. Enquiries 03 9344 5719.

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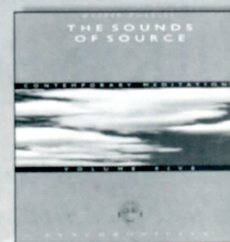
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