

## **CONSULTATION – The use of promotion of complementary and alternative medicine: making decisions about charitable status**

### **Submission from the British Society for Immunology (BSI)**

*The British Society for Immunology is the largest immunology society in Europe. We represent the interests of over 3000 immunologists working in academia, clinical medicine, and industry. Our main objective is to promote and support excellence in research, scholarship and clinical practice in immunology for the benefit of human and animal health.*

As a society that represents investment in scientific research, we support the use of evidence in medical research and we encourage supporting charities that promote peer-reviewed, non-conflicting evidence that demonstrates significant positive benefit, without risk to harming the public. Therefore, organisations which use or promote complementary and alternative medicine (or 'CAM') therapies should be considered a charity where the therapy they are promoting has been extensively researched and reviewed and is concluded without doubt to benefit the population of interest.

It is well established that evidence is required to determine if a therapy advances health or relieves debilitating symptoms. The nature of evidence has been questioned in this consultation. The BSI supports peer-reviewed and reproducible evidence. That is, evidence which undergoes scrutiny and reproduction by experts in the field, ensuring standards of quality, precision and credibility.

Evidence in the form of general acceptance or recognition faces risk of false reporting as is seen for example with 'The Placebo Effect', a beneficial effect, which cannot be attributed to the therapy itself, but rather the patient's belief in the therapy. Inconsistencies or conflicts in research analysis mean potential risk and harm to a patient. Where inconsistencies and conflicts arise, it is especially important to undergo peer-review and risk-benefit analysis before concluding that something should be used in a health setting.

All CAM and conventional medical therapies should undergo peer-review and have significant non-conflicting evidence concluding benefit to a given population. While complementary medicines are used alongside conventional medicine, this does not rule out potential harm. In fact, there is risk of interference with the conventional medicine that has a negative overall effect. For this reason, all types of medical interventions, regardless of classification, should be treated the same to fully conclude the individual and combination therapies effect on a patient.