



HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR

Ministry for Health & Environment

Floor 7, Block 1, St. Bernard's Hospital, Harbour Views Road,
Gibraltar

Telephone: (350) 20072266 Ext. 2011/2012

Fax: (350) 20059942

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Health professionals regulated at last

A major amendment to the Medical and Health Act 1997 was passed in Parliament last week. Until then, the law only provided mechanisms for registration and control of key players in the health sector such as doctors, nurses, dentists and pharmacists. There was however, a very large vacuum when it came to the allied health professions. As the law stood until last week, practitioners of these professions (which includes Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists, Chiropodists, Dieticians and Osteopaths) were outside the regulatory framework.

This means that it was possible for people to hold themselves out to have expertise when in fact they may have had none. That situation carried inevitable risks to persons who seek treatment from these so called 'professionals'.

Following the amendment, the Act now affords protection in both directions. A person accessing an Allied Health Professional will have the comfort that the person claiming to have a specific area of expertise is in fact registered with the relevant UK governing body. Allied Health Professionals will benefit too since they will no longer be exposed to the potential competition from persons who are not entitled to practise. In addition the service users and the public will benefit because the law will now require the regulated professionals to uphold high standards of practice.

Health care professionals have made repeated representations to the Government for this change since the late 1990s. As far back as 2005 the Government issued a consultation precisely on this matter. Regrettably nothing was done after the consultation exercise was completed.

The Act now requires registration with the relevant UK bodies, with their relevant codes of ethics to be adhered to and requires the professionals, as well as dentists and pharmacists who were already covered, to maintain their standards regularly in order to be able to continue to practice.

Speaking on the amendment, Minister for Health, Dr John Cortes, said, "This is a very welcome step in development of health care in Gibraltar, and long overdue. It offers a level of protection to both patients and professionals, never provided in Gibraltar before."