COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE HEALTH
RESEARCH AT THE SCHOOL OF INTEGRATED
HEALTH AT WESTMINSTER UNIVERSITY:
A PROFILE OF THE WORK OF DR VOLKER SCHEID

A new four-year research programme is about to be launched at the School of Integrated Health at Westminster University under the direction of Dr Volker Scheid. The school is a focus of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) research in the United Kingdom, and Dr Scheid's project has been generously funded by the Department of Health. The project will examine the possible contribution of acupuncture and Chinese medicine in the treatment of menopausal syndrome, which is to date a lamentably under-researched field.

Some 80 per cent of women of menopausal age in the UK experience symptoms and almost half of them find them a source of significant distress. With daily newspaper reports alerting us to potential problems associated with hormone replacement therapy, Scheid's project is addressing a real and urgent need.

Existing research into traditional medicines tends to investigate specified treatments within a biomedical context. Typically, they then fail on a number of counts to appreciate the conceptual leaps that are made in cross-cultural transmission and do not provide an adequate framework for a valid trial. On the one hand, they ignore the social and cultural dimensions within which the patients experience their symptoms—and therefore may miss the effects expected from traditional medical treatments. On the other hand, there has been a gross failure to understand issues of knowledge transfer between medical systems. For example, a Chinese term for menopausal syndrome appeared in the Chinese medical literature from the 1960s, yet this was merely an effort to make Chinese medical textbooks fit more closely to dominant biomedical models of disease. In a similar vein, crude translations of the concept of hormone deficiency into the Chinese medical idiom of kidney depletion inevitably distort outcomes by limiting the practitioners' freedom of diagnosis and therefore also their treatment plans.

Dr Scheid's programme is an ambitious attempt to integrate some of the most promising Chinese medical treatment strategies into

modern evidence-based practice. Having been a practitioner of Chinese medicine for over 20 years, as well as an anthropologist and historian of Chinese medicine, he has the inter-disciplinary background necessary to address many of the problematic issues that have haunted researchers into traditional medicines for decades. He is also the author of the well-received book *Chinese Medicine in Contemporary China* (2003). Scheid aims to develop meta-models for evaluation that will embrace qualitative ethnographic research and quantitative methods, narrative analysis, and clinical research. By factoring in the plurality of approaches to menopause offered in the field of Chinese medicine, his ultimate aims are to translate their requirements into NHS institutional infrastructures and provide a cost-benefit analysis of this process. While any concrete results would inevitably necessitate adaptations in both Chinese medical approaches and the institutional realities of NHS healthcare delivery, the programme represents a first and innovative step towards a clinical model designed specifically for traditional medicine. It is also timely, since CAM disciplines are undergoing state regulation and need to find a model for accommodating diverse traditions within a regulatory framework. We look forward to in depth reports of this trial as it progresses.