British Columbia: No Place for Health Freedom

By Naida Geisler, General Manager, Heath Action Network Society

On December 18, 2019, Health Action Network Society received a letter from the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing that communicated the following: The Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch have concluded, through consultation with the Ministry of Health and the Provincial Health Officer that this content did not conform to the Ministry of Health’s Strategic Framework for Immunization in B.C. The letter confirmed that HANS has, as of the date of the letter, lost 40% of our annual funding due to past dissemination of vaccination education information. Interestingly, the referenced BC Ministry of Health immunization framework has been in place since 2007. HANS has received the grant every year since and has, as a condition of the funding, annually disclosed all programming activities. Somehow our activities were not considered nonconforming until 2019.

Current Canadian Governments and Health Freedom

2019 dropped many questions on our laps, provided no answers, and led us to several conclusions that do not comfortably align with the state of democratic freedom we presume to enjoy.

On a national level, most of the holistic and complementary health community is aware that Health Canada is quietly, slowly, implementing a new Natural Health Product framework that threatens the existence of small manufacturers, practitioners who compound as part of their practice, and those who rely on traditional claims to secure their Natural Product Number. The initiative is a slow burn that we’re expected to acclimatize to - much like the proverbial frog in a heating pot of water.

What’s happening in B.C. is somewhat different. A more apt analogy is that of a witch hunt without trial concluded by a burning at the stake.

HANS has historically enjoyed an open, communicative dialogue with the provincial government. One of our founding members recently provided evidence of this: several pieces of correspondence between HANS and various provincial politicians who served throughout the 2000s. Gordon Campbell, Mike Harcourt, and others of varying party affiliations provided supportive, solution-driven, collaborative endorsements of HANS. This is no more.
It’s been a stormy couple of years for those who work in holistic and complementary health in British Columbia. What’s changed? We aren’t sure. It’s certainly not Canadian and British Columbian demand for therapies and products. In 2017, Canadians spent $6.5 billion on providers of holistic and complementary therapies. During the same year, approximately 65 percent of British Columbians used holistic and complementary therapies. British Columbians are the most health-progressive of Canadians; somehow the provincial government is not respecting these well-demonstrated values.

The BC Ministry of Health and the CBC – a disheartening symbiosis

From April 16, 2018 to July 15, 2019 (15 months), one CBC British Columbia reporter published at least 21 stories that were designed to erode public confidence in “alternative” health practices. The stories are alarmist and misleading, providing dramatic headlines and incomplete facts. Said reporter has, through our publicly funded national broadcaster, bullied chiropractors, naturopaths, homeopaths, related institutions, HANS and federal elected officials. Upon reviewing her stories, I can safely say that never once, with the exception of the federal elected officials, were the subjects of the attacks given the opportunity to defend themselves with more than a mere perfunctory statement.

Though Canadian media has remained relatively uneditorialized, (thanks for the most part to the CRTC), a strong bias against alternative health practices and products has emerged in recent years, particularly by the CBC. The 21 CBC stories seem to have been designed to create a public bias, instigate public pressure, and inevitably, illicit a provincial government response.

To be clear, the so-called violations cited in the CBC’s reporting were mostly around dissemination of information, except for one treatment incident that was successful from a health perspective, but easy to sensationalize, exploit, and link to other issues. The CBC stories did not indicate a single injury or fatality at the hands of a practitioner or product. Because none exists.

This is most definitely a chicken and egg puzzle. Did said reporter intentionally create public pressure that the Ministry of Health saw as an opportunity to diminish health freedom in British Columbia? Or did the ministry use the CBC as a tool to attempt to manipulate the public into an anti-alternative health bias? It may or may not be relevant that Adrian Dix, current Minister of Health, was once a CBC contributor.

Sadly, these events – and the provincial government’s support of them – have fueled division and polarization, which begs the question: Is this a case of divide and conquer? Health freedom and respect for health and wellness choice are not only no longer encouraged by our institutions; they’re barely tolerated.

Paradoxically, the motivation behind these efforts to immobilize the holistic and complementary health community - whatever it may be - is the very reason for HANS’s existence. As disappointing as this situation has been, it validates our work and strengthens our conviction. Onward.

"Beware of pro-government media in your country, because it doesn’t open your eyes, it just makes you blind!"  
— Mehmet Murat ildant
Curious about who's putting time and money into influencing the Canadian government? Your provincial government? For the most part, this information is available online.

Federally, the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada provides a number of search options, including a 12-Month Lobbying Activity Search, Advanced Registry Search, Recent Registrations, Recent Monthly Communication Reports, Listing of All Registrants and Lobbyists, and a Listing of Organizations, Corporations, Clients and their Beneficiaries. All of these options, and more, can be accessed by visiting https://lobbycanada.gc.ca/eic/site/012.nsf/eng/00035.html.

Most provinces provide some form of lobbyist registry British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Labrador, and New Brunswick all provide online documentation of lobbying activity. Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut do not currently have lobbyist registries. By using the following search terms in your browser, you can access your provincial government's lobbyist registry online.

Alberta Lobbyist Registry
British Columbia Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists
Manitoba Office of the Lobbyist Registrar
New Brunswick Office of the Integrity Commissioner
Newfoundland and Labrador Commissioner of Lobbyists
Nova Scotia Registry of Lobbyists
Ontario Office of the Integrity Commissioner
Prince Edward Island Lobbyists Registry
Saskatchewan Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists
Québec Commissioner of Lobbying

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Thursday, February 20, 2020  5:00 pm (PST) / 8:00 pm (EST)
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Dr. Stephen Malthouse has been integrating homeopathy into family practice for more than 25 years. He has used homeopathy in Walk-In clinics, emergency departments and in urban and rural family practice, where it fills the gap in conventional treatments in many situations. He graduated from University of Western Ontario medical school in 1978, trained in homeopathy at the International Foundation for Homeopathy in 1990, did homeopathic research in Nepal in 1992-1994, and has practiced as a family doctor on Denman Island, BC since 2006. He is the current president of the Canadian Integrative Medicine Association.
Timothy Caulfield is a Canada Research Chair in Health Law and Policy at the University of Alberta where he is paid by Canadians to research various topics - stem cells, genetics, research ethics, the public representations of science - in a health policy context. He is best known for waging war on wellness by way of fierce attacks on celebrities, natural and holistic products and practices, and pretty much anything that exists outside of his personal belief system.

Caulfield is a divisive personality who frequently encourages polarization and discourages critical thinking, all of which begs the question: Are Canadians willing to accept that their government is supporting and enabling an agenda-driven propagandist working to undermine fundamental Canadian values of informed consent and health freedom?

The Low-Hanging Fruit of Celebrity Wellness

Timothy Caulfield was an early driver of the “wellness backlash” bus. His was a clever strategy: target the most outrageous of current celebrity wellness trends; introduce legitimate natural and integrative practices to the conversation; paint them all with the same “pseudoscience” brush; and, create a narrative using trigger terminology: “snake oil”, “bunk”, “quackery”, “junk science”, and “fake treatments”.

Caulfield built a platform by sounding alarm bells that celebrity culture is “playing an increasingly large role in how we think and talk about our health” and amplifying contrived scenarios. In a 2016 paper, published in the Ottawa Law Review, Caulfield writes “It is still unclear exactly why and how celebrity culture has an impact on our health behaviours and beliefs.” He later continues, “Reports of celebrity suicides are associated with an increase in suicide rates … celebrity endorsements can have a significant impact on the consumption of unhealthy foods … celebrity culture is connected to a range of unhealthy behaviours, including smoking, drinking, and sunbathing.” Caulfield attempts to blur the lines between two very different fundamentals - in this case – “pursuit of wellness” and “self-destruction” - by creating a false equivalent.

Disenchantment with health and wellness exploitation is not unreasonable. Consumer initiatives, big and small, have capitalized on our insecurities, vanity, and fears of growing old or becoming sick, leaving us vulnerable to questionable solutions. But concern over the potential for wellness exploitation is not what Caulfield is really about. His attacks on celebrity culture are a gateway to something much more sinister.

"Pseudoing" His Own Science

With the help of self-described “media visionary” Moses Znaimer, Caulfield launched a television series that, according to the show's summary, “casts light on increasingly controversial procedures, diets and revived ancient therapies that are being sought by people desperate to dramatically alter their bodies or radically improve their health, and the booming industries that are more than happy to accept their business.” In the series, Caulfield pushes doubt about many things traditionally associated with wellness and good health: organic products, chemical-free farming, natural remedies, DNA testing, weight loss strategies, and dietary supplementation.

He also employs his signature tactic of introducing the peculiar with the intent of diluting the credibility of the whole: cryotherapy, the sex tech industry - even spiritual practices - thereby again, attempting to bring everything into question.
Caulfield’s penchant for evidence extends only as far as his narrative will allow. For example, in a recent social media post, Caulfield referred to “wild conspiracy theories about everything from GMOs to fluoride to milk.” Did he fail to consider the August 2019 Journal of the American Medical Association Pediatrics study that confirmed an association between maternal fluoride exposure during pregnancy and lower IQ scores in three and four-year-old children? Omission of this and other evidence which contradicts his position is an example of Caulfield cultivating exactly what he attacks: A misleading half-truth: pseudoscience.

The Church of Caulfield

Caulfield and his ilk are selling religion, a dogmatic worldview presented in binary terms: right or wrong; black or white; facts or bunk; science or pseudoscience. His supporters may appreciate having the world and its important questions answered in these simple terms, but complex issues cannot be fully explored or understood through the narrow perspective from which he attacks. The Church of Caulfield denies individualism, intuition, cultural relativism and choice.

As the Research Chair in Health Law and Policy, Caulfield fails to demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of medical ethics, which provide patients with the right to autonomy, justice, and beneficence. His exaggerated narrative on non-maleficence should really be focused on the opioid crisis and other serious predicaments that are the result of systemic corruption and negligence.

Caulfield’s Real Nemesis: Canadians’ Health Freedom

Can we really accept that Caulfield’s disdain for wellness is about his concern that consumers may be taken advantage of by predatory celebrities hawking jade eggs? We live in a “buyer beware” culture and have always been presented with endless ways to lighten our wallets. Also, no one is being physically harmed by any of the practices he’s attacking. It’s important to remember that no Canadian has ever died as the result of a regulated health or wellness practice or product. On the contrary - individuals who demonstrate an interest in wellness likely experience better health than those who do not. They are also more likely to proactively prevent chronic disease. As a public employee paid to shape health law, Caulfield should not only appreciate, but encourage wellness, if not out of concern for individual Canadians, for the inevitable reduction of public health care costs.

Make no mistake: Caulfield’s beef with Gwyneth Paltrow, and others, is a smokescreen. His raison d’etre has little to do with celebrity wellness and everything to do with your health freedom.

What is most concerning is how some of the public responds to Caulfield’s work, especially evident in the comments that follow his social media, news articles and posted videos. What comes up with alarming frequency, is the term “anti-vaxxer” - even when the terms vaccine, vaccination, or immunization are not present in the article. Caulfield has successfully cultivated a widespread psychological association between wellness and vaccine hesitancy - whether relevant in context or not.

Unfortunately, Caulfield and other health freedom detractors - some right here in Canada - appear to be gaining traction. What should those with the capacity for critical thinking and a desire to uphold medical ethics do? First off, this is, as Caulfield refers to it, a fight. We must fight it on a personal level – and collectively. One place to start is by writing to the University of Alberta Faculty of Law. Let them know that it is unacceptable that they host a research chair who is using public money to undermine health freedom, the wellness industry in Canada, and provincial health care cost savings associated with wellness. You can write to the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Law, University of Alberta, 111 - 89 Ave, Edmonton AB T6G 2H5 or by email to deanoflaw@ualberta.ca.
Welcome to Hans@home2020 - the campaign designed to provide credible, evidence-based health and wellness information Canadians can use to enhance their, and their families' physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. HANS@home2020 focuses on the eight topics that, according to a recent HANS survey, our members, and Canadians generally, are most concerned about.

We invite you to support HANS@home2020!

Who Benefits from HANS@home2020?

All Canadians. HANS@home2020 provides the information that empowers Canadians to make their own best health and wellness choices by raising awareness of health and wellness options beyond what the conventional system has to offer. The campaign also provides solutions and ways to mitigate present-day issues that affect our well-being in 2020. Finally, HANS@home2020 gives Canadians a voice and guides them to advocacy on the issues that most affect them individually.

Provincial Health Systems. Sixty-seven percent of deaths per year in Canada are caused by four major chronic diseases: cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular, and chronic respiratory diseases. Three out of five Canadians aged 20 and older have a chronic disease and four out of five are at risk. HANS’s promotion and protection of natural products supports a preventative approach not typically found in conventional medical practice. As numerous studies indicate, chronic disease prevention results in substantial medical system savings.

Become a HANS Member!

HANS cannot do this work without the support of individual Canadians who believe that they have a role to play in achieving their own best health. We invite you to support our work by purchasing an annual membership for only $40. You can join HANS by visiting https://www.hans.org/membership/. Sign up today!
CELEBRATING CANADIANS' HOMEOPATHY SUCCESSES!

4Homeopathy Canada (4HC) is a Health Action Network Society (HANS) initiative guided by an advisory committee and supported by an extraordinary team of volunteers.

4Homeopathy Canada exists to educate all Canadians about the value and appropriate use of homeopathy as a safe, effective system of medicine. This is being achieved primarily through the 4HC website, social media platforms, webinars, and, eventually, online and on-site educational programming. The campaign has engaged representation and support from all associated sectors, including manufacturers, distributors, retailers, educators, regulators, practitioners, consumers, and patients, to create a unified voice in support of homeopathy.

WE CAN ONLY DO THIS WITH YOUR SUPPORT!
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SIGN UP!

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LIST YOUR PRACTICE!

Create a comprehensive practitioner listing, without charge, at 4homeopathyCanada.org

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