

COMPLAINT NUMBER	17/170
COMPLAINANT	M Taylor
ADVERTISER	Bowen Therapy New Zealand
ADVERTISEMENT	Bowen Therapy, New Zealand, Digital Marketing
DATE OF MEETING	27 July 2017
OUTCOME	Settled

Advertisement: The website for Bowen Therapy NZ, nzbowentherapy.org.nz/discover-bowen/, describes the benefits of the Bowen Therapy technique.

The Chair ruled the complaint was Settled.

Complainant, M Taylor, said: A website advertisement for "Bowen Therapy" contains misleading therapeutic claims regarding its Health Services, in violation of the Therapeutic Health Advertising Code Principle 2a. Because these claims are misleading, the advertisement also fails to observe the high standard of social responsibility required of it by Principle 1. As far as I can tell, there is no evidence to substantiate the claims being made about the service offered.

"The likely consumer takeout would be that this service is capable of providing the healing properties that it describes. The claims made imply that this technique has numerous beneficial properties, none of which I was able to find substantiation for.

The advertisement begins with a vague description, claiming that very subtle moves are performed over the muscles and connective tissue, sending messages deep into the body, then describes the mechanism by which this works as cellular memory a hypothesis generally accepted as pseudoscience. After setting up the method of the alleged treatment, the advertiser proceeds to state "Results can be remarkable, even from the first session, often only a few sessions are needed to correct the presenting problem. The language being used strongly implies remarkable results, so one would assume that the evidence to support these claims has sufficient weight to warrant them.

The advertiser continues: The technique addresses not only the musculo-skeletal framework, but also the fascia, nerves and internal organs. The bodys integrated response improves circulation and lymphatic drainage and aids in the assimilation of nutrients and elimination of toxins. Effectively, this description covers a wide range of potential ailments, and could be seen to promote the Bowen technique to address almost any issue one might have.

The advertisement then lists 37 conditions, under the heading Can the Bowen Technique help me?, and The Bowen Technique should be considered for many conditions which to me appears structured in such a way as to avoid saying directly that the Bowen Technique is effective, but from a consumer perspective would mean much the same thing and could easily be taken at face value considering the elevated authority insinuated by the testimonials and about sections.

The testimonials include language like When my body needs attention, for almost any reason, my first port of call is for a Bowen Treatment. This illustrates my concern that this type of treatment is being used as a catch-all solution and delaying what could be important,

evidence based treatment. At the very least, consumers will be spending money on purported health services which have no evidence of efficacy.

Conditions listed include treatment for babies, infertility, and pregnant women (including breech birth). It is worth noting that the Australian Department of Health included the Bowen Technique in a review of alternative treatments, and found no evidence to support the techniques efficacy for any condition

Bowen Therapy NZ lists numerous treatment providers in rural and otherwise vulnerable communities. The organization provides training and accreditation for its practitioners, which can be contacted directly from the Find Bowen Practitioners section of the website.

In order to pre-empt any claim from the advertiser that they are separate entities from the practitioners I would point to the homepage banner stating Find & Book Registered Practitioners, as clear evidence this website is being used for procurement of Bowen Therapy services. As the practitioners have to register with Bowen Therapy New Zealand, and Bowen Therapy New Zealand is facilitating the provision of aforementioned services, a reasonable person would assume that by procuring the services through them, they would receive the health benefits as stated.

In summary, the claims made on the website do not appear to have been adequately substantiated, and should therefore be considered to violate the Therapeutic Health Advertising Code Principle 2a.

The relevant provisions were Therapeutic and Health Advertising Code - Guideline 2(a), Guideline 2(f), Principle 1, Principle 2.

The Chair noted the Complainant's concern that the Advertiser's website contained unsubstantiated claims about the benefits of Bowen Therapy which were misleading.

The Chair acknowledged the Advertiser had made changes to the website, removing or amending references which were of concern.

Given the Advertiser's co-operative engagement with the process and the self-regulatory action taken in amending the website, the Chair said that it would serve no further purpose to place the matter before the Complaints Board. The Chair ruled that the matter was settled.

Chair's Ruling: Complaint **Settled**