

COMPLAINT NUMBER	19/169
COMPLAINANT	C Woodhouse
ADVERTISER	Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG)
ADVERTISEMENT	Universal Church of the Kingdom of God poster
DATE OF MEETING	29 April 2019
OUTCOME	No Grounds to Proceed

Advertisement: The poster advertisement for the Universal Kingdom of God (UCKG) showed a photo of a woman next to the text: "I was diagnosed with a tumor in my pancreas. The doctors said that if I had surgery, I would risk the chance of getting diabetes and, if I didn't, the tumor could become cancerous and there would be no solution. After anointing myself with Holy Oil where my pancreas was, I went back to do the tests and saw that the tumors had completely disappeared. Today I'm healthy and blessed."

The Chair ruled there were no grounds for the complaint to proceed.

Complainant, C Woodhouse, said:

This morning I parked my bicycle outside the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God on Colombo Street, Sydenham, Christchurch whilst shopping in the area. Their contact point is on this link.

<http://www.ckug.co.nz/locations.aspx?city=155>

I am not religious but decided to look at the testimonial poster on display in the window of the UCKG building. This showed two stories from women claiming that the application of Holy Oil had cured them. One was related to arm pain which didn't particularly bother me. The other was a claim that a pancreatic tumour had been cured without the need of surgery saving the person from diabetes or pancreatic cancer. This I found disturbing .

Both testimonials had pictures of women. They showed only their given names, not their family names and did not say where the people came from. At the foot of the poster in a much smaller typeface it stated that UCKG did not claim to be able to cure anything - that was down to the power of prayer. Neither of the testimonials mentioned prayer and both simply referred to the application of holy oil. There was no mention if holy oil was given by the church or if people wanting to use it had to pay for it. If you don't read the footnotes, which most people don't, it comes across that UCKG is claiming to cure things.

I feel that the information on the poster was at least misleading and quite possibly false.

Many people who have been diagnosed with pancreatic tumours have a very poor prognosis and are likely to be in a time of need and may be very vulnerable. Vulnerable people can be manipulated.

To me it is unacceptable that any registered charity should display such misleading and potentially harmful information.

I feel this should be investigated by the ASA to ensure that what is being displayed by this church is true and valid.

The relevant provisions were Advertising Standards Code - Principle 1, Principle 2, Rule 1(c), Rule 2(b), Rule 2(e)

The Chair noted the Complainant's concerns the poster was misleading because if the viewer doesn't read the footnotes, they might get the impression that the UCKG is claiming to "cure things".

The Chair referred to a precedent decision, 18/348, which was Not Upheld. This decision concerned a newspaper advertisement for the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God which featured a testimonial by a woman who said she asked God to remove a lump above her kidneys and when she went for her next scan the lump had reduced in size. She said "I believe that God heard my prayers. I am now healed and blessed." The Complaints Board agreed it was an advocacy advertisement and the identity of the Advertiser was sufficiently clear.

The Complaints Board said the comments made in that advertisement about the healing power of God were clearly expressed as opinion or belief and the advertisement was not misleading or socially irresponsible.

The Complaints Board noted the disclaimer in that advertisement, which says "...The UCKG does not claim to heal people but believes that God can through the power of faith. Always follow your doctor's instructions..."

The Chair said the precedent decision applies to the case before her.

The Chair agreed this advertisement was advocacy advertising and the identity of the Advertiser, the UCKG, was clear.

The Chair said the context of the advertisement was important, as it was on the doors of the church. The Chair said that while the advertisement is promoting faith-based treatment the Advertiser is not claiming to treat illnesses such as cancer. There is also a disclaimer at the bottom of the advertisement "The UCKG does not claim to heal people but believes that God can through the power of faith. Always follow your doctor's instructions. This ad contains stories from UCKG members across the world. Individual experiences vary but we believe God's power is available to everyone..."

The Chair ruled the advertisement did not meet the threshold to breach of Principle 1, Principle 2, Rule 1(c), Rule 2(b) or Rule 2(e) of the Advertising Standards Code.

The Chair ruled there were no grounds for the complaint to proceed.

Chair's Ruling: Complaint No Grounds to Proceed

APPEAL INFORMATION

According to the procedures of the Advertising Standards Complaints Board, all decisions are able to be appealed by any party to the complaint. Information on our Appeal process is on our website www.asa.co.nz. Appeals must be made in writing via email or letter within 14 days of receipt of this decision.