

Challenging bad medicine: How to use the media effectively

 By [Nicci Botha](#)

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Here's an interesting factoid for you - 10:23 is the saturation point at which the original substance is so diluted that can no longer be detected in a solution. It is also the name of a global public awareness campaign by [The Good Thinking Society](#) to the dangers of homeopathy.



Photo: 10:23 campaign

Homeopathy is one of the most widely debunked forms of alternative medicine continues to be displayed on the shelves of pharmacies. This lends credibility to the claims made about these remedies, explains Michael Marshall, project manager for society based in the UK.

In protest of this endorsement, a flash mob event was staged at 10.23am on 30 January 2010 across Britain. Four hundred sceptics took part in a mass homeopathic 'overdose' in protest at large pharmacy retail chain, Boots' continued sale of homeopathic remedies, and to raise public awareness about the fact that homeopathic remedies have nothing in them,

A year later, the event was repeated in 70 cities across the world, which Marshall hails as a huge success. "There were complaints that it was a publicity stunt, which is precisely what our intention was."

Taking on the NHS

He says that the society "only tackles issues where the science is settled", and their biggest campaign so far is taking on the UK's National Health Service (NHS), which has a history of funding homeopathic treatments.

The NHS is a government-mandated body established in 1948, and because one of the founding fathers was a proponent of homeopathy, it was included as a treatment option from the start.

Today, most decisions on what the NHS will cover are made at local level through clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) to ensure funds are spent effectively and responsibly.

Marshall says the campaign started in the north of England and specifically targeted those CCGs that supported homeopathic treatments, some of which didn't even know they were doing so. The campaign of understanding and engaging with regulation and regulators has paid off, Marshall says.

Engaging the media

He says that the [media coverage](#) has been good. "A systematic approach is key. We're looking not just at individual quacks, but at the entire industry, and a planned media strategy is part of the campaign."

This they do by either engaging with science journalists who understand the field, or producing media statements that are published as is, because they are well researched and written. "The media helps focus attention on issues and educate the public. So, far, Good Thinking appears to be having a positive influence across many sectors of the alternative health industry in the UK," Marshall says. Other areas the society has targeted is vaccine awareness, veterinary homeopathy and claims by chiropractors that they can cure colic in babies.

However, journalists fail to understand that healthcare is science", and celebrity endorsements also lend credence to pseudoscience. He cites the example of how photos of swimmer, Michael Phelps, with [cupping](#) bruises on back circulated around the world and sparked interest in the practice, even though there is no scientific evidence to show it works.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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