

THE SITUATION OF CAM IN THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM

A football match between Belgium and Holland always raises a lot of 'animo' in both countries. The Dutch being more offensive and creative players, the Belgians being rather defensive in their game... This clearly reflects the mentality and the different energies in both countries, which is also distinctively showing in their approach to CAM: the Dutch being more open, the Belgians more conservative.

In December 1993, in the Netherlands the BIG law (Beroepen Individuele Gezondheidszorg: Professions in Individual Healthcare) was voted by which the Monopoly of Regular Medicine was abolished all together and CAM practices, as a whole, were officially and legally free to practice, although there was and is still a lot of scepticism and even opposition amongst many Medical Doctors, especially oncologists. Was this acceptance due to the more 'open' spirit of the Dutch or to the specific medical situation there, with long waiting lists for all kind of treatments, nobody knows for sure. Unfortunately, in recent years this very progressive attitude, especially among politicians and doctors seem to slowly turn around...

In Belgium, nine years later, a law was voted to recognize only four (4) CAM disciplines: Acupuncture, Homeopathy, Chiropractics and Osteopathy. This law, called a frame law, was intended to regularize these CAM methods under certain conditions, and not only, as some journalists and politicians claim nowadays, to stop quacks... For every single method some kind of chamber should be installed, which was to set up rules for training and practice and guard the specific deontology of every system.

This law has never been implemented since, even not by a 'Green' Minister of Health, Magda Aelvoet... For different reasons: there seem to be some technical abnormalities in the law itself, the opposition of the medical Establishment put a hold on this implementation, and the CAM groups themselves were not eager to participate in a board with a majority of University Academics (8) and Medical doctors (8), and only 8 people representing the practice itself. This means that, especially CAM practitioners who are not doctors can still be persecuted for 'Illegal practice of Medicine'... happily that is getting more and more seldom lately.

For the general public, patients and people who want to use CAM, this creates a big, mainly social difference. In Holland CAM is openly and widely used and by society fully accepted. In Belgium it is still almost a taboo, used by many, but nobody has a clue how many...

Generally speaking though, in both countries, CAM is only paid back in the Private Insurance system, and into limited extends as far as money and amount of treatments is concerned. While in the Netherlands many more CAM disciplines are paid back than is the case in Belgium where only Homeopathy, Chiropractics and Osteopathy are refunded by some companies. Acupuncture is refunded by other Companies, who recently decided though, only to pay it back if it is applied by a Medical Doctor... On the other hand, CAM is in Belgium more in use by patients than in Holland, 11,5 % against 9,9%! As in football, sometimes the Belgians are able to win the game against the Dutch wonder boys...

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