

Professor appeals to end unscientific health claims

By **Elisa Rose**

Bridgewater professor Rob Morrison is among a group of scientists who caught the attention of the State Health Minister in January in their bid to prevent false claims in the chiropractic industry.

Prof Morrison is a founding member of pro-science organisation Friends of Science in Medicine (FSM) which sent a letter to Minister Jack Snelling last month, in his role as chair of the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, outlining concern over the way unscientific claims are handled within the industry.

Prof Morrison said the claims included improving asthma, bed-wetting and autism in children and are not supported by scientific evidence.

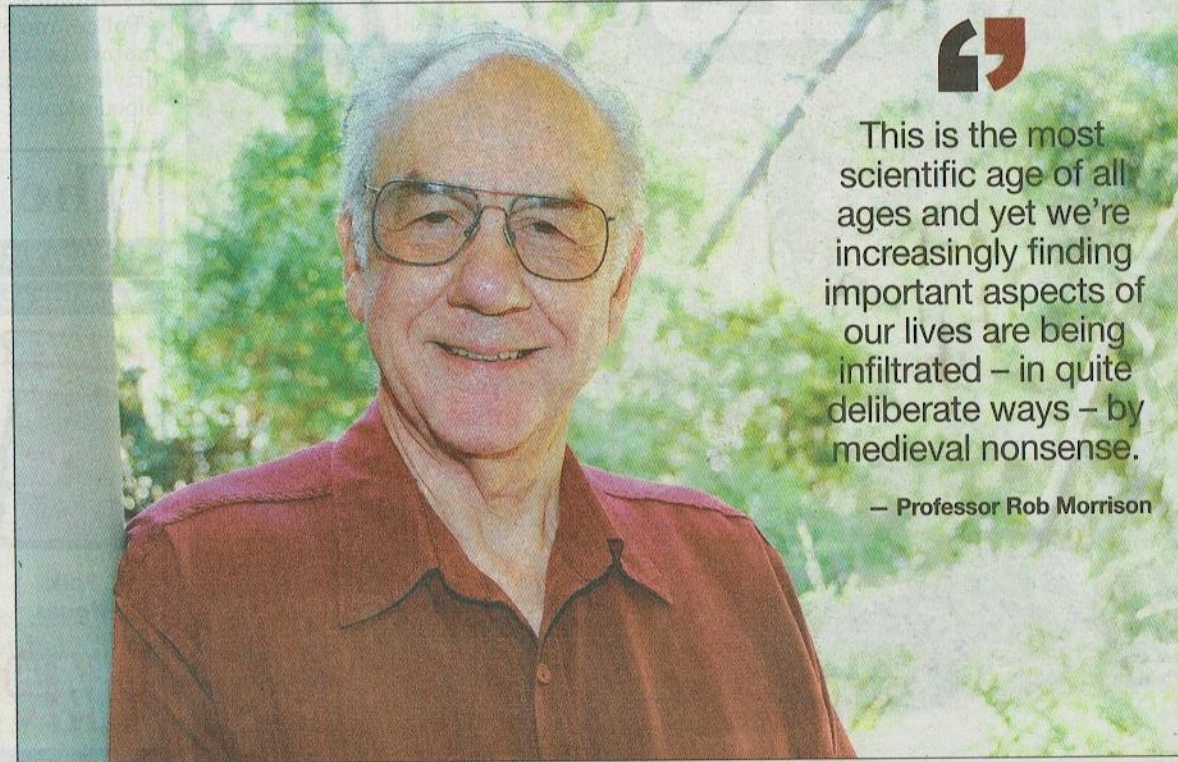
He said the organisation, whose members include medical professors, is concerned the Chiropractic Board of Australia (CBA) has not adequately deterred chiropractors from making such claims, nor has it adequately "penalised" those who do.

Response

The letter was copied to all State health ministers with a list of 400 chiropractic websites that referenced treating children.

Shortly after receiving the letter Mr Snelling wrote to the CBA and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) in response to recent media attention and concerns that had risen about the industry – including those raised by FSM.

The Minister's letter



Bridgewater scientist Prof Rob Morrison is calling for stronger action against professionals who make health claims that are not supported by scientific evidence.

recommended that the CBA remind chiropractors to practice evidence-based care and ensure they do not make claims that are not supported by evidence.

He also requested the CBA and AHPRA provide him with information about how they have – and will in the future – handle the occurrence of misleading information in the field.

Prof Morrison, with a background in zoology, was pleased the Minister had responded and said that appropriate use of science in healthcare was important for two reasons.

"This is the most scientific age of all ages and yet we're

increasingly finding important aspects of our lives are being infiltrated – in quite deliberate ways – by medieval nonsense," he said.

"That offends me as a scientist. "Secondly, we're being told as a country that we're spending too much ... yet when you look at what your money and my money is being used for, it's being used to support this rubbish and pay for it."

While Prof Morrison is deeply concerned about practitioners claiming cures that are not evidence-based, he said chiropractics and other such treatments have value as complementary methods.

"Complementary medicine

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– Professor Rob Morrison

beneficial as adjuncts to proper evidence-based treatment – we have no argument for that," he said.

"But if they're done properly they don't set themselves up as cures."

Chiropractic Association of Australia SA (CAASA) board member Dr Sam Millard said the association did not support claims that were not evidence based but that evidence-based treatments were constantly evolving.

"Core to CAASA and our members is the delivery of evidence-based health practice," he said.

"We are firmly committed to ever-enhancing the evidence base underpinning chiropractic care."

"As with other health disciplines, the evidence base for chiropractic care is constantly evolving, as researchers undertake new studies and trial the effects of different therapies."

The State Health Minister has requested a response from the CBA and AHPRA by early March.

I would strongly encourage you to remind chiropractic registrants that the Board's *Code of conduct* states that practitioners must practice in an evidence-based and patient-centred manner so that they provide the best possible healthcare for their patients and should not make claims in advertisements for which there is no evidence base.

Yours sincerely

The Hon Jack Snelling

Chair, Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council

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Extract from a letter by State Health Minister Jack Snelling to the Chiropractic Board of Australia.