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An Old Bailey judge has called for new regulation on traditional Chinese medicines as a "doctor" who sold cancer-causing pills walked free from court.

Ying "Susan" Wu sold the tiny brown "Xie Gan Wan" tablets to Patricia Booth for more than five years from a shop in Chelmsford, Essex.

Mrs Booth, 58, began taking the pills three times a day to treat a skin condition but they ended up destroying her kidneys and giving her cancer.

But Judge Jeremy Roberts ruled that, as the sale of traditional Chinese medicines was totally unregulated, there was no evidence that Wu knew of the potential harm.

The judge threw out a charge of "administering a noxious substance" against the 48-year-old, of Holland-on-Sea, Essex, and she pleaded guilty to five lesser counts and was given a two-year conditional discharge.

Giving his ruling he said: "It is an unfortunate fact that there is no system in this country to regulate Chinese herbal medicine retailers like Ms Wu by requiring them to be registered with an appropriate professional body or trade association."

"Somebody like Ms Wu is entitled to set up shop as a herbal medicine retailer and to operate entirely unsupervised. There may be a gap in our law here which the Government might wish to address."

The court heard that Mrs Booth took the medicine, which she bought from the Chinese Herbal Medical Centre in Chelmsford, from February 1997 to November 2002. She said she believed it was a "safe and natural alternative" to the antibiotics she had previously been taking for her skin condition - and which she feared could damage her long-term health.

Months after she stopped taking the Chinese pills, she was taken seriously ill and had to undergo an urgent blood transfusion. An analysis of the pills showed they contained a banned substance, aristolochic acid. Her health deteriorated to such an extent that her kidneys were "destroyed" and she had to have them removed, she contracted urinary tract cancer, and she later suffered a heart attack.

The Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine, which represents more than 450 practitioners, said the case highlighted "the urgent need for the statutory regulation of herbal medicine in the UK".

Source: http://www.google.com/hostednews/ukpress/article/ALeqM5hxjPS1wJu0UH_xzBY-lsioYSt9og