

Courts slam 'potentially sinister' group spreading tentacles across the UK

From Byron to Britain: Bizarre 'cult' on march

STEPHEN DRILL

SECRET emails have revealed an Australian swim teacher – referred to by her father as the reincarnation of Winston Churchill – instructed members of a cult in England.

Simone Benhayon, 34, sent emails encouraging followers of Universal Medicine to post comments online at least five times a day, except for those who had been on a "time travel experience".

Universal Medicine, which was started near Byron Bay, was being run in the one-pub village of Tytherington, two hours west of London, a short drive past Stonehenge.

A *Bulletin* investigation has uncovered details of how Ms Benhayon, who is listed as a director of Universal Medicine UK on Companies House, was involved in communicating with followers in the UK.

The cult reportedly involves followers burping out bad spirits and going to bed at 9pm and getting up at 3am. They also follow a strict diet, which bans alcohol.

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LOCAL RESIDENT NINA FOY

Ms Benhayon wrote to followers: "At this stage it feels as though there are people taking advantage of the program by saying they are on it but are not stepping forward and embracing it ... this means a minimum of 5 comments per day."

In another email she gives an allowance to some of her European followers because of their recent "time travel experience".

A website about Universal Medicine founder Serge Benhayon has hundreds of comments below testimonials about the group.

Ms Benhayon, Serge's daughter who locals say drives a black Porsche, runs a swimming program from a 15m pool in the buildings used by Universal Medicine. Lessons have been cancelled due to coronavirus restrictions. Many local schools stopped using the pool after details of Universal Medicine's activities became known.

The UK Court of Appeal this month ruled that a female member must leave the group or lose access to her daughter, finding that it made the daughter vulnerable to "eating disorders".

A UK court also said the



Australian swim teacher Simone Benhayon, who is listed as a director of Universal Medicine; her father and founder Serge Benhayon; and the home of Serge Benhayon, near the group's UK hub.



INSIDE UNIVERSAL MEDICINE

- Founded in 1999 in NSW, now has chapters in UK and across Europe, after leader Serge Benhayon had an epiphany on the toilet.
- Followers go to bed at 9pm and wake up at 3am.
- Door handles can only be turned in an anticlockwise direction.
- Some followers believe burping banishes evil spirits.
- Drinking alcohol is banned.
- Women told not to play sport because it risks their fertility.
- "Their right ovary becomes more powerful than their left ovary," Benhayon says.
- Benhayon has said he was the reincarnation of Leonardo da Vinci.
- He also claims his daughter Simone Benhayon was the reincarnation of Winston Churchill.

group had "potentially harmful and sinister elements".

In 2018, the NSW Supreme Court found that Universal Medicine, run by Serge Benhayon – who says he is the reincarnation of Leonardo da Vinci – was a "socially harmful cult".

A jury also found Serge Benhayon had an "indecent interest in young girls as young as 10" and that Universal Medicine "preys on cancer patients".

The group, which tells women they should not play sport because they risk infertility, has continued on, despite the court battles. In addition to

their strict routines, followers are expected to turn door-knobs only anticlockwise.

Universal Medicine has also continued to offer "esoteric breast massage".

"Today many women lack true care and connection with their bodies, and as a result, with their breasts," a Universal Medicine website says. Sessions cost \$70.

Nina Foy, a Tytherington local, said she wanted Universal Medicine and its followers to leave the village, saying the group "sucked in vulnerable people" for money. "I would like them to move

out. They are a cult and they prey on the vulnerable; it's just immoral," she said.

Fishermen who have a lease on a carp-filled lake on the property say they were annoyed they had to pack up at 8pm during summer hours, wondering if followers "ran around naked".

Others in Tytherington said members of the group were "zombos", walking strangely through the town at night.

Serge Benhayon, a former tennis coach, started Universal Medicine in 1999.

It was based in Goonellabah, northern NSW. Its web-

site claims it now has centres in Germany, Norway, Belgium, Holland, Spain, Canada and the US.

Universal Medicine has not run workshops at its UK base since last year.

Ms Benhayon did not answer the door when News Corp visited her home last week.

A black Porsche SUV was parked in a home used by Simon Williams, who has a testimonial on a Universal website.

Mr Williams was a graduate of Eton College, which Prince William, Prince Harry and UK

Prime Minister Boris Johnson attended.

All the curtains were drawn in the modern house that looked like something from the set of the James Bond film *Quantum of Solace*.

There were several Audis in some of the homes along the small street where the centre was based, which are a common vehicle for members of Universal Medicine.

A woman in the training centre declined to comment, saying she was only there to do cleaning.

Serge Benhayon did not respond to calls or emails.