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LAWYERS CALL ON GOVERNMENT TO GET TOUGH ON UNQUALIFIED HAIRDRESSERS

A leading lawyers group is calling for hairdressers across the country to be brought under Government control in a bid to reduce injuries caused by unqualified stylists.

Denise Kitchener, spokeswoman for a national SafetyWatch campaign run by the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL), says anyone can pick up a pair of scissors and call themselves a hairdresser because the whole industry is completely unregulated.

"We hear horror stories regularly about women whose lives have been ruined by hairdressers who are not properly qualified," she says. "It's appalling that someone who has little or no experience can use potentially harmful chemicals on someone's hair," says Denise. "Most women simply do not realise the industry is unregulated. Many women never think to ask about their stylist's qualifications or experience - yet the devastation caused when something goes wrong can literally ruin lives.

"We know of a woman who had grown her hair from being a young girl - she had a perm but the chemicals caused her hair to melt and scald her scalp. She had complained to her hairdresser that her scalp was hurting, but was fobbed off. Her hair was ruined; completely melted, and she had to have it all cut off. She was absolutely devastated," said Denise.

John Byrne, chief executive of the Hairdressing Council, says the call to regulate the industry has been going on for many years but so far the Government has failed to take action.

"There is no requirement for hairdressers to be properly trained or even to prove they are competent," he says. "The only safeguard people have is that hairdressers can register with the Hairdressing Council to show clients they are qualified. The problem is that registration isn't compulsory - there are around 130,000 hairdressers in the UK but only 10,000 of those are registered.

"Inexperienced and incompetent hairdressers can cause horrific injuries," he says. "At the moment, though, hairdressers can do whatever they like because there is no regulating body to oversee the industry. If someone suddenly decides they want to be a hairdresser, they can be."

Leading trichologist Carol Walker agrees the only way forward is for the industry to be regulated.

"In the USA, every hairdresser in every state has to have a new licence every year," she says. "This isn't scaremongering - hairdressers put chemicals onto another person's head and yet they aren't regulated! I have seen first-hand the effects of something going wrong - women who have suffered severe burns, disfigurement and permanent scarring. My advice to everyone is do not be afraid to ask questions. Most hairdressers will be only too pleased to tell you how well qualified and experienced they are."

Denise Kitchener says APIL called for regulation in 1999 and will continue to raise the issue until something is done. The Hairdressing Council's John Byrne is fully supportive and says if more people raise the issue, then there is a better chance of the Government making parliamentary time to take action.

"It seems the issue hasn't been important enough so far," he says, "but try telling that to someone whose life has been turned upside down by someone who shouldn't have been practicing as a hairdresser in the first place."

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Note to editors:

APIL was set up in 1990 by a small group of solicitors who wanted to provide a voice for injured people, and is now a recognised voice within Government and other organisations. APIL's SafetyWatch campaign aims to highlight potential hazards to people in order to prevent injury. Visit www.apil.com

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