

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE - AN OVERVIEW

WWG uses a joint-practitioner model whereby a traditional medicine practitioner and medical/allied health practitioner are paired for client assessment and a multidisciplinary team develops the treatment plan and delivers the services.

Traditional medicine provides primary health care to 80 per cent of the world's population (Alves & Rosa, 2005). There are complete systems of traditional medicine such as traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), *ayurveda* in India and Arabic *unani* medicine. There are also many forms of indigenous medicine, often called ethno-medicine. Ethno-medicine is often focussed on herbalism and cult healing (Alves & Rosa, 2007).

During the last decade, use of traditional medicine has expanded globally and has gained popularity. It has not only continued to be used for primary health care of the poor in developing countries, but has also been used in countries where allopathic medicine is predominant in the national health care system.

While 80 per cent of the population in developing countries have traditional medicine as their only means of health care, in many developed countries, 70 to 80 per cent of the population has used some form of traditional medicine as an adjunct to orthodox medicine (World Health Organisation, 2008).

Internationally, herbal treatments are the most popular form of traditional medicine, and are highly lucrative in the international marketplace. Annual revenues in Western Europe reached US\$ 5 billion in 2003-2004. In China sales of products totalled US\$ 14 billion in 2005. Herbal medicine revenue in Brazil was US\$ 160 million in 2007 (World Health Organisation, 2008).

Due to the increasing demand and popularity of traditional medicine, the World Health Organisation and health authorities in many countries are starting to focus more on traditional medicine. The WHO has published many resources about traditional medicine in primary care, training guidelines, research guidelines and national policy responses (see <http://apps.who.int/medicinedocs/en/cl/CL10/>).

Despite its widespread use throughout the world, there are also serious threats to traditional medicine - from governing authorities (particularly in the European Union), environmental degradation and the effects of popularity itself, which has led to commercialisation, commoditisation and large-scale harvesting and even animal poaching in some parts of the developing world.

In Australia, traditional medicine has also gained popularity. In 2005 Australians spent \$4.13 billion on 'alternative medicine' - more than was spent on prescription drugs in that year (Ellis & Zilko, 2008). An earlier South Australian survey estimated that 52 per cent of the Australian population used 'complementary and alternative medicine', of whom 57 per cent did not tell their doctor, and 23 per cent consulted practitioners of complementary medicine. The study estimated out-of-pocket spending for complementary medicines in Australia of \$2.3 billion; a 62 per cent increase since 1993 and four times out-of-pocket spending compared with pharmaceutical drugs (MacLennan, Wilson, & Taylor, 2002).

In Australia, traditional medicine is partly regulated and partly unregulated. Ingested medicines are regulated by the Commonwealth Government through the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA regulates traditional medicines through manufacturing codes, classification of medicines,

restriction of medicines, listing permitted medicines, controlling the export of medicines and other post-market regulatory activities such as reporting adverse reactions, audits and testing of medicines (Department of Health and Ageing, 2012).

In Australia, practitioners are not required to be professionally registered in order to practice. However, to attract private health fund rebates, there is a requirement to be properly qualified, registered and insured. Therefore many traditional medicine practitioners are registered and regulated through their professional association. These associations liaise with the TGA and other authorities over regulatory and other issues. It is also through these professional associations that practitioners of certain types of traditional medicine are able to obtain their annual TGA certificate that enables them to prescribe 'practitioner only' medicines. Membership to professional associations is restricted to practitioners with adequate qualifications from recognised Australian educational institutions. Overseas practitioners are often required to sit examinations to determine their level of expertise and knowledge. Practitioners of traditional medicine therapies that are not recognised by professional associations, for example, Samoan traditional massage, are not granted professional membership and therefore are not regulated through these bodies. Such practitioners often work in isolation, within their own cultural boundaries.

TERMINOLOGY

Integrative medicine	The practice of medicine that incorporates evidence-based therapies, whatever their origin, with conventional medicine.
Orthodox medicine	Medicine that is widely taught in medical schools and is accepted by most medical practitioners. It is the predominant health care approach in Australia.
Alternative medicine	Orthodox medicine is rejected and an alternative approach is used. It is generally used in places where traditional medicine is not integrated into the health system.
Complementary medicine	Orthodox medicine is seen as incomplete and to complement it, other therapies are used. This could be to enhance treatment outcomes or minimise side effects. It is a term generally used where traditional medicine is not integrated into the health system.
Complementary and alternative medicine	This is a less specific term. It is widely used in the United States.
Natural medicine	Natural medicine generally involves naturally derived therapies such as herbs, diet, vitamins, lifestyle or environmental dimensions. It normally focuses on enhancing the body's ability to heal. It can be an ambiguous term as some therapies in orthodox medicines can be natural (eg lifestyle coaching) and some therapies used by traditional medicine practitioners may not be natural.
Holistic medicine	This medicine involves a philosophy that encompasses body, mind, social, spiritual, lifestyle and environmental factors. It also does not distinguish between orthodox and traditional medicine
Traditional medicine	Traditional medicine is the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.

(Phelps & Hassed, 2011; World Health Organisation, 2012)

In WWG we have a preference for the term 'traditional medicine'. The other terminology generally imply that traditional medicine is an adjunct to orthodox medicine, or an alternative to it. Although traditional medicine can be used as a complementary approach to orthodox medicine, it can also be used in its own right as the primary treatment approach.

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