

10th Conference on Health Care of the Chinese in North America

Development of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) - Hong Kong Experience



Margaret FC Chan, MD, JP (Hong Kong), Director of Health, Department of Health, Hong Kong

While practitioners of western medicine are the main health care providers in Hong Kong, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) plays a significant role in a health care system of Hong Kong. Its popularity of use and its good potential in primary health care provide the drive for its development.

Government Policy

The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region provides that the Government shall, on its own, formulate policies to develop western and traditional Chinese medicine. The Government Policy has been summarized in the 1997 and 1998 Policy Address of the Chief Executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. He announced that for the protection of public health, a statutory framework would be established to accord legal recognition of TCM and to regulate the practice, use and trading of TCM. Hong Kong has the potential to develop over time into an international center for Chinese medicine.

Strategy for Development

1. Establish a statutory regulatory framework

The Chinese Medicine Ordinance was enacted on 14 July 1999. The Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong was established under the Ordinance in September 1999. It is an independent statutory body responsible for implementing regulatory measures on Chinese medicine. TCM practitioners will be regulated through a system of registration, examination and discipline. Chinese medicines will be regulated through a licensing systems. for Chinese medicine traders and a registration system for proprietary Chinese medicines. Regulatory measures for Chinese medicine will be introduced by phases from 2000.

2. Development of standards

The establishment of statutory framework lay the solid foundation for the future development of TCM in Hong Kong. Other strategies include, among others the development of heal related and industry-related standards. To facilitate the development of international standards relevant to Chinese medicine, concerted efforts from experts worldwide and the World Health Organization (WHO) are required. A WHO meeting on Methodologies for Research and Evaluation of Traditional Medicine was held in April 2000 in Hong Kong. An internationally accepted guideline will be

published and disseminated to member states for reference in end 2000. Locally, the Chinese Medicine Council of Hong Kong set local standards for regulation and registration of Chinese medicine.

3. Development of centres of good clinical practice

In due course, there will be channels in the public health sector to promote the use of TCM and the development of centres for evaluation of health benefits derived from Chinese medicine-based products through clinical trials and research.

4. Establish a good system of education and training

At present, full-time degree courses on Chinese Medicine are provided by two local universities. In the long run, an adequate pool of high calibre professionals could be produced locally to support Hong Kong's development to become an international center for Chinese medicine.

5. Create a supportive business environment

A supportive business environment is important to upgrade existing Chinese Medicine manufacturing companies and to attract new entrants of good potential to build up local Chinese Medicine Industry.

6. Promote research, development and innovation

It is important to create a network of institutions of high standing for research and development work and innovation to support new drug development and enhance competitiveness of industry.

7. Enhance intellectual property protection

Last, but not the least, the issue 'intellectual property protection' needs to be addressed.

Challenges ahead

In the 21st Century, there remains other issues that need to be addressed. These, among others, include:

- The strategic positioning of TCM in the health care system
- The interface of TCM practitioners and practitioners of western medicine
- The integration of TCM and western medicine

The future of TCM is bright and its popularity will continue to grow. With concerted efforts of the professionals, the industry and the Government, the potential of TCM can soon be realized.