

REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC



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FOREWORD

Traditional medicine is an ancient medical practice which existed in human societies before the application of modern science to health. It has evolved to reflect different philosophical backgrounds and cultural origins. Although modern medicine is widely spread, traditional medicine still exists in all countries and areas in the Western Pacific Region. Interest in traditional medicine has increased over the last decade and seems likely to continue. People in many countries are now more prepared to look for alternative approaches to maintain their health. Demands for traditional medicine from the public and the growing economic importance of traditional medicine have led to increased interest on the part of both governments and academic communities in the Region.

WHO's traditional medicine programme was developed in conjunction with the adoption of the health for all strategy and the primary health care approach. WHO has collaborated with many countries and areas to develop their traditional medicine programme and to bring traditional medicine into the mainstream of the health service system, where appropriate.

This regional strategy for traditional medicine has been prepared to guide national governments, WHO and other partners in the efforts to ensure the proper use of traditional medicine and its contribution for maintaining health and fighting diseases in the Region. The regional strategy has identified strategic directions and actions which provide general principles and guidance for countries and areas to use in responding to the challenges which they may face with consideration of the unique situation in each country and area..

The WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific adopted a resolution on traditional medicine during its 52nd session held in Brunei Darussalam in September 2001, which called for a greater political support for traditional medicine and more scientific evaluation, standardization and regulation of traditional medicine. The Committee also adopted the Regional Strategy on Traditional Medicine which establishes a blueprint for the development of traditional medicine in the Region.

Through the preparation and publication of the regional strategy on traditional medicine, WHO remains committed to increasing its support to countries in promoting the proper use of traditional medicine. The application and implementation of the regional strategy on traditional medicine will reaffirm the leading role played by this Region in the development of traditional medicine and its integration with national health service systems.

Shigeru Omi, MD, Ph.D
Regional Director

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OVERVIEW

Traditional medicine is the knowledge, skills and practice of holistic health care, recognized and accepted for its role in the maintenance of health and the treatment of diseases. It is based on indigenous theories, beliefs and experiences that are handed down from generation to generation.¹

Traditional medicine is practised in many countries, but it is not always included as part of the health system recognized by the government. It is one of many types of non-standard health services which involve varying levels of training and efficacy. The difference between the origins and nature of more recent forms of alternative medicine and traditional medicine is often not well understood. In some health systems all these therapies, including traditional medicine, are collectively termed “complementary”, “alternative” or “non-conventional medicine”. In the West, the umbrella term complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is widely accepted as including both traditional medicine and more recent forms of non-standard medicine. A recent modification of the well-known Cochrane definition described CAM as including: “all such practices and ideas self-defined by their users as preventing or treating illness or promoting health and well-being. Boundaries within CAM and between the CAM domain and that of the dominant system are not always sharp or fixed”. The same author defined “mainstream medicine” as the “usual method of treating disease” and “orthodox” medicine as “that taught in the majority of university medical schools”.² “Mainstream” and “orthodox”

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