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The promotion and development of traditional medicine

Report of a WHO Meeting

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**WHO MEETING ON THE PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT
OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE**

Geneva, 28 November–2 December 1977

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THE PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

Report of a WHO Meeting

INTRODUCTION

A WHO Meeting on the Promotion and Development of Traditional Medicine was held in Geneva from 28 November to 2 December 1977. Dr Ch'en Wen-chieh, Assistant Director-General and Chairman of the Headquarters Working Group on Traditional Medicine, opened the meeting on behalf of the Director-General. He stated that the consultation had been convened in response to the considerable interest evinced in traditional medicine, which had also been expressed in resolution WHA30.49, adopted by the Thirtieth World Health Assembly in 1977, and in the subsequent requests by Member States for technical collaboration in organizing educational and research activities in this field.

The aim of the Meeting was therefore to assemble expert representatives of the major systems of traditional medicine to work together and suggest a plan of action to promote and develop the various aspects of traditional medicine.

The specific objectives were to make practical suggestions on policy guidelines for the provision of materials and techniques, collaboration among different systems of health care, health education of the public, manpower development, organization of health services, the future development of traditional medicine and its utilization, particularly in the national health services, and relevant research.

A major problem for special consideration was the effective collaboration of different practitioners and their integration into an overall national health care delivery system.

The Meeting then proceeded to discuss the theme: "Promotion and development of traditional medicine" under the following headings:

- Traditional medicine in health care
- Reasons for the promotion of traditional medicine
- Utilization of traditional medicine in national health care systems
- Integration of traditional medicine and modern medicine
- Manpower development for traditional medicine
- Research promotion and development in traditional medicine
- Recommendations

1. TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN HEALTH CARE

The Meeting addressed itself to the following questions :

- What is traditional medicine ?
- What is a health care system ?
- How can traditional medicine be linked with health care systems ?
- What factors determine the identification of traditional medicine ?
- What kind of policies and practical actions could be adopted to promote traditional medicine ?

1.1 Concepts of traditional medicine and practitioners

1.1.1 Traditional medicine

Reference was made to the definition of traditional medicine already attempted by a group of experts from the African Region, convened by the WHO Regional Office for Africa, that met in Brazzaville in 1976. The definition arrived at by the group of experts was as follows :

“... the sum total of all the knowledge and practices, whether explicable or not, used in diagnosis, prevention and elimination of physical, mental or social imbalance and relying exclusively on practical experience and observation handed down from generation to generation, whether verbally or in writing.

“Traditional medicine might also be considered as a solid amalgamation of dynamic medical know-how and ancestral experience.

“Traditional African medicine might also be considered to be the sum total of practices, measures, ingredients and procedures of all kinds, whether material or not, which from time immemorial had enabled the African to guard against disease, to alleviate his sufferings and to cure himself.”¹

Traditional practitioners of Ayurveda define life “as the union of body, senses, mind and soul,” and in this context consider “positive health as the blending of physical, mental, social, moral and spiritual welfare.”² The moral and spiritual aspects are here stressed and thus give new dimensions to man and the system of medicine by which he maintains his health.

¹ AFRO Technical Report Series, No. 1, 1976 (*African traditional medicine*. Report of the Regional Expert Committee), pp. 3-4.

² From : Principles and practice of traditional systems of medicine in India (working paper presented by M. A. Razzack to the Meeting).

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