

## The health system approach to the complementary and alternative medicine

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**Letter to Editor**

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The use of complementary and alternative medicine has remarkably increased in different societies across the world, such that the World Health Organization has emphasized in its recent approach the revival of traditional medicine in different regions of the world [1]. Throughout the history, in particular, in the past centuries, human beings have attempted to improve their health status to achieve the longstanding goal of increased longevity. To this end, different cultures and civilizations, based on their own attitudes, have offered different medical alternatives such as Iranian, Indian, Chinese, and Native American traditional medicine, and Yoga, as well as methods like homeopathy, osteopathy, and chiropractic. Iranian traditional medicine has received the attention of scientists and ordinary people for a long time, due to its rich resources and scientific background, and its compliance with the health teachings of Islam and the recommendations of the Prophet and the Imams (PBUT). The development of traditional medicine requires organizing this discipline, to centralize its education programs, and to base its curriculum content on scientific and well-documented evidence in order to properly justify scientific and academic societies about its use, and prevent possible abuses that occur in the field of complementary and alternative medicine. In line with this, the establishment of the secretariat of the council of traditional and complementary medicine training in the ministry of health, the herbal medicine headquarter,

and the traditional medicine faculty are important and effective measures for institutionalizing and organizing these sciences in Iran. An important task of this secretariat is to plan for providing effective human resources necessary for traditional medicine, whose curriculum has been designed for MA and Ph.D. courses in Iran. Three effective factors for progress and organization in this area are as follows: 1- designing academic curriculum, and training these sciences in universities in compliance with academic education standards, 2- extracting results based on research, evidence, and valid documents, and 3- the transparent, accurate, and proper dissemination of information to academic societies. Any mention of traditional, complementary, and alternative medicine has always triggered different reactions ranging from a complete and unqualified acceptance to a full-fledged unreasoned rejection. Ordinary people and, indeed, some physicians consider these two methods as opposed to each other, take one of them

as adequate and reject the other. However, due to the wide range of sciences and the limited nature of human knowledge, we can claim that the past and present human knowledge and experience are not complete and need to be developed by learning from and respecting the predecessors' experience. Therefore, it is appropriate to pay attention to both traditional and modern medicine and consider them as complementary disciplines [2]. The use of different methods of traditional and complementary medicine is increasing for the following reasons:

- 1- It is easily accessible in developing countries.
- 2- It is usually the only healthcare service available to extremely poor patients.
- 3- It is highly mixed with people's beliefs and convictions in some regions.
- 4- People are sometimes unduly worried about the complications of chemical medicines.
- 5- Many hypotheses and methods of the new school of medicine have been challenged.

Generally, if we wish to benefit from traditional and complementary medicine as a source of healthcare, the following issues should be considered:

1- Policy-making and adopting a specified policy as the foundation for the role of traditional and complementary medicine in the national healthcare system. This, also, assists in providing the predicted required financial sources.

2- It is very difficult to determine the safety, efficiency, and quality of the methods and pharmaceutical products used in traditional and complementary medicine as a result of inadequate research practices and poor information in the field.

3- Respecting intellectual property rights and monopoly privileges, this can be highly effective in reaching benefits from the extensive use of traditional medicine.

4- The logical use of diverse methods and assurance of their usefulness, with an emphasis on qualification and licenses for the practitioners, the proper use of quality products, establishing a suitable relation between the advertisers of traditional methods, patients and physicians, in a way that scientific information and required guidance are provided for the public [3].

5- Setting and observing standards for the performance of the practitioners of complementary medicine. The most important reason for using traditional and complementary medicine is “to decrease the mortality and morbidity among people with limited access to healthcare services”, which consists of four phases as follows. 1- The integration of the known and effective methods of traditional and complementary medicine, to the extent it is possible and in a scientific manner, with national healthcare systems at three levels of:

I- The pervasive or consolidated system in which traditional and complementary medicines is fully recognized and operate in all areas of healthcare planning.

II- The used system, which recognizes traditional and complementary medicine.

III- The tolerating system in which the national healthcare system is based on modern medicine [4].

1- Improving the safety and quality of traditional and complementary medicine by setting quality standards

2- Improving the ability of people, in particular, the

poor to access, as far as possible, to traditional and complementary medical services

3- Making effective use and appropriate therapeutic application of traditional medicine by practitioners and consumers. A major goal of any country's healthcare system is the improvement of its people's health status, such that they attempt to identify and eliminate the society's needs by using their own research capacity. From a managerial perspective, if the country's healthcare system endeavors for the standardization of the procedures of traditional and complementary medicine, some important measures should always be taken into account as follows: an accurate definition of traditional and complementary medicine, the role of the state in the development of traditional and complementary medicine, the effectiveness of the treatments and products of traditional and complementary medicine, making laws for herbal medicines, training and assessing the practitioners of traditional and complementary medicine, promoting the appropriate use of traditional and complementary medicine, providing insurance coverage and formulating the intellectual property rights of beneficiaries. Policy-makers and practitioners should pay attention to all these issues, which highly contribute to the reputation of the therapeutic procedures of the country's healthcare system [5].

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