

# The Malaysian Medical Association's Position Paper on Relevance of Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM) In Malaysia

By MMA Committee on Integrative Medicine

## By Introduction:

T&CM – “A form of health-related practice designed to prevent, treat or manage ailment or illness or preserve the mental and physical well-being of an individual, and includes such practices as traditional Malay medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, traditional Indian medicine, Islamic medical practice, homeopathy, and complementary therapies.” *[but excludes medical and dental practices used by a medical and dental practitioner, respectively.]* \* (Traditional and Complementary Medicine Division Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2017)

## World Health Organisation (WHO) Definition:

### Traditional Medicine (TM):

It is the sum of the knowledge, skill, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to diverse 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.

### Complementary Medicine (CM):

The terms “complementary medicine” or “alternative medicine” refer to a broad set of health care practices that are not part of that country’s own tradition or conventional medicine and are not fully integrated into the dominant health-care system. These terms are used interchangeably with traditional medicine in some countries.

T&CM can be divided into:

- a. Ingestive therapies: such as herbal medicine, food as medicine (nutritional medicine), and herbal supplementation.

- b. Physical therapies: such as remedial massage, myotherapy, movement therapies, and spinal mobilization /manipulation.
- c. Energetic therapies: such as acupuncture, homeopathy, music, vibration, magnetic, colour and flower essences.
- d. Mind-body techniques: such as meditation, relaxation techniques, and guided imagery.
- e. Lifestyle practices and counselling: such as tai chi, qigong, yoga, work-life balance, and sleep hygiene.

### **Abstract**

Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM) encompasses diverse practices designed to prevent, manage and to treat. For the Malaysian context T&CM includes traditional Malay, Chinese, Indian medicine, Islamic medical practices, homeopathy, and complementary therapies, as governed by the Traditional and Complementary Medicine Act 2016 (Ministry of Health, 2016).

The National Health and Morbidity Survey 2015 highlights significant trends in T&CM usage in Malaysia, with 29% of the population seeking T&CM services, often as complementary or primary treatment. Usage is higher among females and urban populations, indicating a growing acceptance and integration into mainstream health management. T&CM practices range from ingestive therapies (e.g., herbal medicine) to physical, energetic, and mind-body techniques, supported by various public and private sector initiatives. (Institute for Public Health, 2015)

The national T&CM Blueprint also highlights the formal education available for these practitioners. (Traditional and Complementary Medicine Division Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2017)

A policy change is proposed by this paper to bridge the gap between the conventional healthcare and T&CM practices to ensure the demand of public is met in a safely.

### **Malaysian Scenario:**

#### **Trends on the Usage of Traditional and Complementary Medicine (T&CM) in Malaysia:**

The findings of the National Health & Morbidity Survey conducted in 2015 by the Ministry of Health, Malaysia as follows:

- An estimated 29.25% of the population had ever used any T&CM practices with consultation and 21.51% of the population alone used T&CM within the last twelve months with consultation.
- Females showed significantly higher T&CM use (23.89%) compared to males (19.33%).

- The urban population had higher percentage of use (22.64%) compared to rural population (18.23%).
- For those who seek T&CM practices for therapeutic purposes, 41.18% used the practices as complementary to conventional treatment, while 40.44% chose T&CM as the first line or primary treatment before seeking conventional treatment.
- This study reported 18.38% of those who used T&CM practices solely as an alternative treatment without seeking any conventional treatment.
- When T&CM was used as treatment, the intended use was for primary and complementary treatment.

### **Conclusions of the Survey:**

1. T&CM continues to be an important presence in this country as it has made impact to the health of Malaysian population.
2. There is a need to continue providing T&CM practices to offer options for patients and for healthy individuals especially in maintaining wellness and complementing mainstream medical system.
3. Services of T&CM are obtained at various facilities depending on the practices offered.
4. The cost of the services for the T&CM practices is within an affordable rate.
5. Supplementary products were abundantly consumed by the Malaysian population.

### **WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014-2023:**

“The strategy aims to support Member States in developing initiative-taking policies and implementing action plans that will strengthen the role of traditional medicine plays in keeping populations healthy”.

This present strategy devotes more attention towards prioritizing health services and systems, including traditional and complementary medicine products, practices, and practitioners (World Health Organization Executive Board, 2022)

### **Measures by the Ministry of Health (MOH) Malaysia:**

The T&CM Act was enforced on 1st August 2016. The T&CM Council was then formed on 16th January 2017 and chaired by the Director General of Health. The purpose of this process represents

Malaysia’s steadfast approach in regulating and professionalising the T&CM industry. (Ministry of Health, 2016)

#### Other Significant Milestones include:

- a. Establishment of Herbal Medicine Research Centre under the Institute of Medical Research (IMR) in 2000 and the T&CM Division in the MOH in 2004.
- b. Introduction of National Policy on T&CM in 2001 (revised in 2007). The policy, among others, stated that “T&CM shall be an important component and contribute towards enhancing the Health and Quality of all Malaysians.”
- c. Establishment of T&CM Units in selected MOH hospitals throughout Malaysia that offer T&CM services for specific indications. At present fifteen hospitals have established T&CM units/departments.
- d. Launching of Traditional and Complementary Medicine Blueprint - 2018-2027 (Health Care). One of the Strategies in this Blueprint is to “plan and develop appropriate integration models to optimise the contribution of T&CM in Health Care Management.”

#### Private Sector Initiatives:

Private institutions have started programs in T&CM at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. At the International Medical University, they have a program titled “Master of Science in Acupuncture (MSc Acupuncture) – a two and a half (2.5) years program started in 2018 and since then 5 Allopathic Doctors have successfully completed the program. (To date another 12 Allopathic Doctors have enrolled in the program).

Below are the lists of local private institutions that offering MQA accredited T&CM programs:

|    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 1. | INTI International University                           | Bachelor of Traditional Chinese Medicine (Hons) |
| 2. | Management and Science University                       | Diploma in Traditional Chinese Medicine         |
|    |   | Bachelor in Traditional Chinese Medicine (Hons) |
| 3. | Southern University College                             | Bachelor of Traditional Chinese Medicine (Hons) |
| 4. | University Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) Sungai Long Campus | Bachelor of Chinese Medicine (Hons)             |
|    |   | Master of Medical Science (Chinese Medicine)    |
|    |   | Doctor of Philosophy (Chinese Medicine)         |
| 5. | International Medical University                        | Bachelor of Science (Hons) Chiropractic         |
|    |   | Bachelor of Science (Honours) Chinese Medicine  |

|     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
|     |  | Master of Science in Acupuncture (MSc Acupuncture)  |
| 6.  | University of Cyberjaya                              | Bachelor of Homeopathic Medical Sciences (Hons)   |
| 7.  | Lincoln University College                           | Bachelor of Homeopathic Medical Science   |
| 8.  | Malvern International Academy                        | Diploma in Acupuncture  |
| 9.  | SPACE College  | Diploma in Traditional Malay Medicine   |
| 10. | Xiamen University Malaysia                           | Bachelor of Medicine in Traditional Chinese Medicine  |
| 11. | International Institute of Management and Technology | Diploma in Traditional Chinese Medicine (Acupuncture)<br><br>Bachelor in Traditional Chinese Medicine, collaboration with<br><br>Fujian University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, China |

#### **Use of T&CM Modalities among Allopathic Doctors:**

The current practice amongst some registered medical practitioners exists. They might have attended either formal or informal training in the chosen T&CM modalities. However, the use of T&CM modalities among the medical doctors remains controversial, as per the Medical Act 586, and on the other hand, they do not have a registrable qualification with the T&CM Council. With the aim to achieve holistic healthcare, we suggest the following changes to be made at the MOH level to allow these medical doctors with formal training in the chosen T&CM modalities to continue practice T&CM. Here are the suggestions:

*Option 1:* To register the term “Integrative Medicine” as one of the recognised T&CM modalities and allow the medical doctors to incorporate chosen T&CM modalities into their clinical practice. The nature of modalities labelled as components in Integrative medicine will need to be assessed by the CIM committee of the MMA – prior to submission to the T&CM division of the MOH and then onward to the T&CM council for endorsement.

*Option 2:* To undertake a clinical attachment with the Institution providing the course – to certify the practitioner. After which submit the information to the T&CM division for registration to practice the modality.

#### **Summary:**

T&CM has a long history of use in health maintenance, in disease prevention and treatment, particularly for chronic disease. The findings of the National Health & Morbidity Survey (NHMS) 2015 shows that approximately 29% (estimated ten million) of Malaysians sought T&CM treatment, and of this number approximately 40.44% (estimated four million) of Malaysians choose T&CM as

the first line or primary treatment before seeking conventional treatment. This survey shows that T&CM is an important and often underestimated part of health services.

In view of the increasing awareness among Malaysians on the availability of T&CM, as well as the increasing number of patients that seek T&CM as a first line of treatment it becomes more imperative that we as Allopathic Doctors Firstly recognize and acknowledge this trend and secondly make a concerted effort in updating our knowledge in this field – if we so desire.

Presently there are fifteen public hospitals under MOH that have established T&CM Units/Departments. The nature of T&CM services provided vary in each of these hospitals. This itself is an indication that MOH has initiated a trend towards aligning T&CM with allopathic medicine.

For Allopathic Doctors that have undertaken accredited courses in T&CM we propose that these qualified practitioners be allowed to register under the T&CM Act for them to practice. However present practice guidelines under CKAPS and any other that may be issued by the Director General of Health, MOH will have to be adhered too.

## References

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