

Media centre

WHO to define information standards for traditional medicine

Note for the media

7 December 2010 | TOKYO, JAPAN - WHO will develop, for the first time, a classification of traditional medicine, paving the way for the objective evaluation of its benefits.

Creating an evidence base for traditional medicine

The *International Classification of Traditional Medicine* project will assist in creating an evidence base for traditional medicine –producing terminologies and classifications for diagnoses and interventions.

"We recognize that the use of traditional medicine is widespread. For many people—especially in the Western Pacific, South-East Asia, Africa and Latin America—traditional medicine is the primary source of health care", said Dr Marie-Paule Kieny, Assistant Director-General of Innovation, Information, Evidence and Research at WHO. "Throughout the rest of the world, particularly Europe and North America, use of herbal medicines, acupuncture, and other traditional medicine practices is increasing. Global classification and terminology tools, for traditional medicine, however, have been lacking".

International platform to harmonize data

The International Classification of Traditional Medicine will have an interactive web-based platform to allow users from all countries to document the terms and concepts used in traditional medicine.

"Several countries have created national standards for the classification of traditional medicine but there is no international platform that allows the harmonization of data for clinical, epidemiological and statistical use. There is a need for this information to allow clinicians, researchers and policy-makers to comprehensively monitor safety, efficacy, use, spending and trends in health care", said Kieny.

The classification will initially focus on traditional medicine practices from China, Japan and the Republic of Korea that have evolved and spread worldwide.

For more information, please contact:

- In Tokyo:

M. Meri Robinson Nicol Technical Officer

WHO

Mobile: +41 79 468 2588 E-mail: robinsonm@who.int

- In Geneva: Alice Ghent

Communications Officer

WHO

Telephone: +41 22 791 1498 Mobile: +41 79 206 1087 E-mail: <u>ghenta@who.int</u>

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Health topic: traditional medicine

WHO Family of International Classifications

Health topics

Traditional medicine



Traditional medicine (TM) refers to the knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures, used in the maintenance of health and in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness. Traditional medicine covers a wide variety of therapies and practices which vary from country to country and region to region. In some countries, it is referred to as "alternative" or "complementary" medicine (CAM).

Traditional medicine has been used for thousands of years with great contributions made by practitioners to human health, particularly as primary health care providers at the community level. TM/CAM has maintained its popularity worldwide. Since the 1990s its use has surged in many developed and developing countries.

General information

<u>Fact sheet: traditional medicine</u> <u>How safe is traditional medicine?</u>

Technical information

<u>Traditional medicines: definitions</u> More about traditional medicine

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Classifications

The WHO Family of International Classifications

The WHO constitution mandates the production of international classifications on health so that there is a consensual, meaningful and useful framework which governments, providers and consumers can use as a common language.

Internationally endorsed classifications facilitate the storage, retrieval, analysis, and interpretation of data. They also permit the comparison of data within populations over time and between populations at the same point in time as well as the compilation of nationally consistent data. The purpose of the WHO Family of International Classifications (WHO-FIC) is to promote the appropriate selection of classifications in the range of settings in the health field across the world. The basis for the WHO Family of International Classifications and the principles governing the admission of classifications are set out in the paper on the "WHO Family of International Classifications'. This paper also provides a protocol to those wishing to submit a classification for inclusion in the WHO-FIC.

More information on the WHO-FIC

Types of Classifications

The WHO-FIC is comprised of:

- 1. Reference Classifications: Main classifications on basic parameters of health. These classifications have been prepared by the World Health Organization and approved by the Organization's governing bodies for international use
- International Classification of Diseases (ICD)
- International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)
- International Classification of Health Interventions (ICHI)
- 2. Derived classifications

Derived classifications are based on the reference classifications (i.e. ICD and ICF). More information on the derived and related classifications

Classifications and Clinical Terminologies

Classifications capture snapshot views of population health using such parameters as death, disease, functionality, disability, health and health interventions, which inform management and decision making process in the health system. Over time they also provide insight on trends, which informs the planning and decision making processes by health authorities. The multiplicity of possible perspectives on health results in a variety of classifications. Their necessary evolution poses challenges for consistency. More recently, the varied applications in health information systems and the general availability of information and telecommunication technologies (ICT) has highlighted the need for increased interoperability.

The base line information that is aggregated for public health purposes is increasingly derived from health records, which contain both patient care related information, and also information that is crucial for management, health financing and general health system administration. The accuracy and consistency of the health records is crucial to ensure the quality of care and sound management of health systems resources. This calls for accurate and consistent use of clinical terminologies and recognition of the particular importance of semantic interoperability.

Possible synergies between classifications and clinical terminologies, have been identified crucial for future work, particularly in the perspective of a growing automation of information processing. WHO and its network of collaborating centres are taking steps in that direction.

Events

MORE INFORMATION

WHO-FIC Strategic Documents