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Traditional Chinese Medicine Focus of NCCAM Research Program

Editorial Staff

In October 2003, the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine announced the creation of three new research grant programs. Known as CERC (Centers of Excellence for Research on CAM), DCRC (Developmental Centers for Research on CAM) and PICRC (Planning Grants for International Centers for Research on CAM), the grant programs were created to expand the NCCAM's list of existing research centers, and to further research into the safety and effectiveness of alternative medicine.

Building on the foundation laid by those programs, the NCCAM has announced funding for three additional centers of excellence for research and two international centers for the study of complementary and alternative medicine. Three of the centers will investigate therapies used by practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine, including acupuncture and herbal formulas, in the treatment of conditions such as arthritis, asthma, and bowel disorders. Together, the centers will receive more than \$5.2 million in first-year funding alone, and will help to improve the level of CAM research conducted in the U.S. and abroad.



"We are excited by the addition of these centers to our research program, and the unique collaborations and approaches they bring to studies of CAM practices," remarked Dr. Stephen Straus, the NCCAM's director. "All five centers will strengthen our research portfolio for major health problems - HIV/AIDS, arthritis, asthma, and pain. Plus, the new international centers will conduct basic and clinical studies of promising CAM interventions drawn from traditional medicine indigenous to the locations of international partners."

Centers of Excellence for Research on CAM

One of the new centers of excellence, the Center for Arthritis and Traditional Chinese Medicine, will be based at the University of Maryland in Baltimore. The center will study traditional Chinese medicine approaches such as acupuncture and herbs for the treatment of arthritis. Among the studies to be performed at the center, researchers will conduct a clinical trial of an 11-herb Chinese formula known as HLXL in the treatment of osteoarthritis of the knee; assess acupuncture's effect on inflammatory pain in an animal model; and study the effectiveness of HLXL in an animal model of autoimmune arthritis. The center will receive more than \$1.1 million in first-year funding, and approximately \$6 million over a five-year period.

"For centuries, millions of people have used the treatments of traditional Chinese medicine for all kinds of ailments," said Dr. Brian Berman, the center's principal investigator. "Now we have the opportunity to apply Western scientific standards to see if these therapies really help people and, if so, why."

At Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York, meanwhile, the Center for Chinese Herbal Therapy has been established, under the direction of Dr. Xiumin Li. At the center, researchers will investigate the effectiveness of a three-herb Chinese formula (anti-asthma herbal medicine intervention or ASHMI) as a remedy for allergic asthma. A variety of studies will be performed on the formula, which will help determine its mechanism of action, its active components, and its effectiveness in asthma patients (see editor's note at end of article).

In addition, Temple University School of Medicine's Center for Mechanisms Underlying Millimeter Wave Therapy will study the mechanisms of action of millimeter wave therapy, a type of energetic medicine involving low-intensity electromagnetic waves. Scientists will look at the therapy's use in

animal models to determine its effects in treating conditions such as neuropathic pain and pruritis.

International Centers for Research on CAM

In 2003, the NCCAM awarded the University of Maryland (along with the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the University of Illinois at Chicago) approximately \$255,000 to develop a research collaboration that could compete for larger grants. The institutions were successful in creating The Center for Functional Bowel Disorders in Chinese Medicine, with the purpose of carrying out research on CAM and traditional medicine practices in other countries.

Based on the successful establishment of the center, the NCCAM has awarded it a new, four-year international centers research grant. As a result, the center will receive more than \$800,000 in initial funding, and approximately \$4 million over the course of the grant, to conduct research on the use of traditional Chinese medicine in the treatment of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Scientists at all three universities (along with the University of Western Sydney in Australia, which recently became a member of the center) will study the effects of acupuncture and herbal preparations in an animal model of IBS, and also will conduct a preliminary study of an herbal preparation with IBS patients.

The second center, the International Center for Indigenous Phototherapy Studies, will be based at the University of Missouri-Columbia, and will conduct research in conjunction with four institutions in South Africa. The goal of the center is to study the safety and efficacy of several African plant-based therapies used to treat HIV, AIDS, and related infections. Clinical trials will be conducted on various herbs, including sutherlandia and African wormwood, which are used by traditional healers for many of the conditions seen in people with HIV and AIDS.

NCI to Also Fund TCM Research

In addition to the funding provided by the NCCAM, the National Cancer Institute has announced that it will continue to fund the International Center of Traditional Chinese Medicine for Cancer, a multinational research partnership between the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, Texas, and Fudan University Cancer Hospital in Shanghai, China. Although the amount of funding has yet to be determined, the center will perform clinical and preclinical studies on the use of herbs, acupuncture and *qigong* in the treatment of breast and colorectal cancer. Studies will also investigate the treatment of cancer-related symptoms and treatment-related side-effects.

For additional information on the new research centers and the amount of funding allocated to each program, contact the NCCAM Clearinghouse at (888) 644-6226, or visit www.nccam.nih.gov.

References

1. NCCAM expands research centers program with three centers of excellence and two international centers. National Institutes of Health press release, Oct. 14, 2005.
2. Boston S. UM researchers receive \$10 million to study traditional Chinese medicine. University of Maryland Medical Center press release, Oct. 19, 2005.

Editor's note: The herbal formula to be studied by Dr. Li was described in detail in Dr. Jake Fratkin's December 2005 article, "[Stunning Herbal Formula Wins Recognition in the Western Medical Community](#)".

