

It Will Take a Team

When Prince Charles appeared before the World Health Organization recently, he spoke about the need for more utilization of traditional healing methods and emphasized the urgent need for a better balance between man and nature. This brings into focus the need for balance, much of which can be achieved if more of the global population utilizes traditional medicine (TM), as it is being named by countries of the Pacific Rim: China, Korea, Japan, Vietnam and Australia. This common goal is being addressed by the countries of the Pacific Rim. Their cause and common goal is bringing TM into its own place in the health care system, both in the U.S. and globally.

TM has sustained itself through the centuries. It has been practiced in each of the countries of Asia with different ideals, protocols and herbal formulations. These same countries have reached a consensus on the name "traditional medicine," creating a common language about its practice so it can be captured in the health care system of information. This common language leads to the standardization of records and research. The standardization of TM will create a better, healthier society through the sharing and dispensation of information. Now is the time to begin to standardize and analyze data so it can be placed into the international technology system.

By developing a consensus in nomenclature and terminology, the profession can create an equal and adequate representation of clinical concepts, protocol and interventions from different countries, cultures and language, which can lead to the sharing of knowledge and research to ultimately benefit the world.

In the United States, there is a need to reach a consensus between all of the groups and create a national TM policy. This policy will create a platform and a network for sharing knowledge while embracing cultural diversity. This policy begins with the consensus of terminologies, which leads to greater understanding. This consensus helps to build the team, and there is strength in numbers.

The establishment of a national TM policy forms the basis for standardization. Many benefits can be derived from standardization. Individuals may lose some things, but others will be gained. Standardization will help develop health care information systems that can link to insurance, exchange information and research, distribute resources, assure patient safety, and provide services to a global population. There have been discussions in the past as to whether Oriental medicine providers must be compliant with HIPAA rules and regulations. To be in the health information systems, HIPAA compliance is required. This information technology sector is pushing to advance the use of electronic records. Take a moment and remember back when the banking system was not electronic; now the use of electronic banking is worldwide.

The health care system is next. Electronic records serve patients. Think about the frequent traveler. In case of illness in another state or country, health care records, especially those from hospitals, could be accessed online in a matter of minutes. This can more easily happen with the standardization of terminologies, classification (such as the International Classification of Disease codes used for

diagnosis) and diagnosis-related groups (DRGs). Health information is the glue that holds a health care system together. In most countries, stronger, more integrated systems are required.

There are a number of issues in TM that must be discussed and on which a consensus must be reached:

- a national policy to help create a global policy;
- implementation of TM into the health care system;
- the ability to supply TM, and a monitoring and evaluation of those services;
- standards for quality assurance and safety;
- trade with others both nationally and globally, including international property rights, economics and financing;
- human resources and training;
- legislation and regulations;
- research; and
- publication and the dissemination of information.

There must be reliable evidence for standardization in order to create policy. Standardization reduces duplication and thus conserves economic resources. When data and information are gathered, it must be standardized in order to use it efficiently and economically, and the information must be processed and collected into computer databases.

Within the universe, people, practitioners and governments must have the ability to exchange health information and use the information that has been exchanged. TM information must be sustainable, reliable and valid in order to integrate it into the health care information system globally. This creates an international platform and network for the sharing of knowledge, which ensures equal access to open exchanges, improving of interventions and sharing of records. The result is better service and outcomes for patients globally.

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