

Integrating Traditional and Complementary Medicine in Universal Health Care

BACKGROUND

Traditional and complementary medicine (T&CM) remains as one of the reliable sources of healthcare among rural areas and the poor. In 1992, the Traditional Medicine program was launched by the DOH to promote traditional medicine in the country. This was followed by the passage of Republic Act 8423, or the Traditional and Alternative Medicine Act (TAMA) of 1997, which enabled the creation of the Philippine Institute of Traditional and Alternative Healthcare (PITAHC). The institute was established to encourage the development and research of traditional and alternative healthcare in the country.

Currently, PITAHC has embarked on the following initiatives to carry out their mandate: (1) development of reference materials, standards, guidelines, and code of ethics on traditional and alternative medicine; (2) advocacy for increased awareness and practice of T&CM through Traditional and Alternative Healthcare (AHC) month, (3) integration of T&CM services in two DOH-retained hospitals; and (4) certification of TAHC practitioners and accreditation of TAHC facilities.

CURRENT ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

- PITAHC currently lacks regulatory and enforcement powers to regulate the practice of T&CM in the country, which is important to ensure the provision of quality, safe, and effective T&CM services.
- There is also a lack of baseline data on present T&CM modalities and the number of T&CM practitioners in the Philippines.
- There are concerns on the sustainability of T&CM implementation in DOH hospitals. This is due to a lack of plantilla positions and non-inclusion of T&CM services in the benefit package of PhilHealth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Strengthen regulation of T&CM products, practitioners and facilities**
Amend TAMA Law to provide PITAHC regulatory powers over T&CM practices, practitioners, facilities, and products. In the interim, PITAHC shall coordinate with other regulatory agencies, particularly PRC, FDA, and DOH-HFSRB, to regulate the aforementioned health inputs using standards co-developed with PITAHC.
- 2. Develop T&CM Units in all DOH hospitals**
Institutionalize and enhance the provision of T&CM in health facilities by establishing T&CM units in DOH hospitals. Advance implementation will begin with Batangas Medical Center in Luzon, Vicente Sotto Memorial and Medical Center in Visayas and Southern Philippines Medical Center in Mindanao
- 3. Develop practice and research capacity for T&CM**
Develop and capacitate a critical mass of doctors and other allied health professionals through the integration of T&CM in medical and allied health curriculum.
- 4. Include T&CM in PhilHealth coverage**
Include T&CM services in PhilHealth coverage through the development of evidence for Health Technology Assessment and Clinical Practice Guidelines, as well as engage in continuous communication with PhilHealth in developing the appropriate benefit packages. Currently, in Thailand, traditional medical therapies such as Traditional Thai Massage and Ventosa Cupping Methods are available in their health facilities and are being reimbursed by their Social Health Insurance.

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This Brief is written by Menina Barbara Santiago, Michael Niel Angelo Bulatao, and Dr. Janice Mandapat-Sanchez, edited by Dr. Gloria Nenita Velasco and Dr. Maria Iris Baltazar, designed by Jake Matthew Kho and Cherie Tan.