
FOREWORD

In many parts of the world, where medicines are not readily available or affordable, the public continue to rely on medicines used traditionally in their cultures. At the same time, affluent consumers in the industrialized world are spending their own money on healthcare approaches that fall outside what has been considered mainstream medicine. A growing body of national and international studies highlight the reality that there is exponential growth of global interest in and use of traditional (i.e. indigenous), complementary and alternative medicine (TCAM). The scale of this is so sizeable that it constitutes a public health phenomenon in itself.

There is considerable use of traditional medicine in many developing countries: 40% in China and Colombia; 71% in Chile; and up to 80% in some African countries (World Health Organization Global Atlas on Traditional, Complementary & Alternative Medicine, Bodeker *et al.*, 2005). In a number of industrialized countries, almost half of the population now regularly uses some form of CAM, while the figures for Canada and Germany are 70% and 71–75% respectively, and Australians spend more on complementary medicines than on pharmaceutical drugs. In the US, Americans now make more visits to complementary practitioners than to primary care physicians and spend more on complementary therapies than on hospitalizations.

Individuals seek to avoid long-term use of pharmaceuticals, with their potential for side effects. Thus, chronic conditions including pain conditions are a major reason that people seek the help of CAM practitioners. Women outnumber men in their use of CAM, often by 2:1. CAM use is also

associated with higher education, higher income and strong environmental values.

Naturally, governments have become increasingly focussed on the public's need to be assured of safety, reliability and a beneficial therapeutic outcome from the healthcare choices that they make. Accordingly, these societal trends have been matched in the past decade by a growing momentum in regulation, research, policy development and professional education.

Drawing on data from policy studies, and in areas of priority in international health, such as malaria and HIV, as well as in the areas of common ailments such as skin conditions and fractures, this book provides a unique and important overview of the major trends of relevance to public health and health policy. After almost two decades of international research into the clinical and experimental dimensions of complementary and traditional therapies, this newer focus on the public health and policy dimensions will bring research and policy attention to a new and wider set of questions. These include: evidence based decision-making, the cost-effectiveness of TCAM treatments compared with other more mainstream approaches to managing health and disease; how the health and safety of populations is impacted by TCAM use; and how TCAM providers can best partner with mainstream healthcare colleagues to deliver AIDS and malaria prevention messages and to communicate information on healthy lifestyles.

The focus on population trends in self-medication, expenditures on alternative healthcare modalities, healthcare outcomes for TCAM and chronic disease, and the prospects for low-cost and locally available methods of disease prevention and management is timely. Indeed, it is overdue in view of the widespread and long-standing use of TCAM globally.

By providing a public health and policy perspective, the various chapters in this book illustrate a basis for effective integration of services for the benefit of the public, and potentially for cost-savings to governments through effective means of prevention and affordable methods of health maintenance and disease control. The book brings together a global overview of the challenges, promise and professional requirements of a vast area of health care practice that is now international

in scope and worthy of increased attention and analysis. The single most important challenge for the future is to provide solid evidence-based decision making, as has been done recently in the area of malaria therapy.

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