

Developing Consumer Information on Proper use of Traditional, Complementary and Alternative Medicine

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ABSTRACT

The use of traditional medicine (TM) and Complimentary and alternative medicine (CAM) has increased significantly over the past few years, During the last decade, the use of complimentary medicine has increased in both developing and developed countries. Globalization has led to inter cultural exchange and widespread use of techniques and therapeutic product of CM often unknown to local communities. This Phenomenon requires Particular attention in order to avoid inadequate misunderstandings and inappropriate use that could be harmful to the individuals and subsequently affect entire communities. The important and strategic sector of consumer Protection, which has been considered as one of the priorities in economic health Care planning as outlined in the twenty objective. The priority runs parallel to the most recent World Health Assembly Resolution Traditional Medicine in 2003. which urged member states of the World Health Organization to provide reliable information on Traditional medicine (TM) and CM to consumers and providers In order to promote proper use. The Regional Government and the World Health Organization have established a four year cooperation plan to develop technical guidelines and information on complementary Medicine to help ensure the safety of consumers. It is extremely important to create the condition for the correct and appropriate use of CM methods which, if used correctly, can contribute to the protection and the enhancement of patients can contribute to the protection and the enhancement of patients health and well being.

One of the main reasons for the increasing use of traditional medicine is a growing trend. for patient to take a more proactive approach to their own health and to seek out different forms of self-care. In the process many consumers have turned to natural traditional medicine products and practice, under the assumption that " Natural mean Safe". However this is not necessarily the case. A number of reports have revealed examples of incorrect use of traditional incidents of overdose, unknowing use of suspect or counterfeit herbal medicines, and unintentional injuries caused by unqualified practioner, In an effort to prevent similar incidents, there is a need to ensure that consumers are well informed about the proper use of traditional medicine. These guidelines are intended to provide technical guidance in order to assist member states in developing context- specific and reliable consumer information promoting proper use of traditional medicine (TM) and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). In developing the information, health authorities are recommended to collaborate with range of stakeholders, representing different perspectives, including NGOs, Professional and consumer organizations and TM/CAM researchers. The objective of these guidelines are to provide an overview of the Key elements directly to consumer that must be in place in health systems in order to ensure proper use of TM/ CAM.

To describe the general principles and activities for the development of reliable consumer information about TM/ CAM To outline the key elements that should be taken into consideration when developing consumer information promoting proper use of TM/CAM.

The long-term goal is to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks of TM/ CAM use by empowering consumers to become active participants in health Care and to make informed choices. WHO recognizes that efforts to promote the proper use of TM/CAM through consumer educational/ training must be supported by other measures such as the establishment of national laws and regulations to control herbal medicine products, efforts to ensure the qualified practice of TM/CAM therapies, and where appropriate, measures to control information about TM/CAM used in advertisement in a followup to the development of these guidelines, WHO is to organize a series of inter regional, regional, and national workshop, for the national health authorities and relevant NGOs on how to develop consumer information on the proper use of TM/CAM and how to organize education/ training programmes on this at a national level. Since the use of TM/CAM varies from country to country, national health authorities and NGOs should rely on their own specific situation to develop appropriate consumer information and relevant training programmes some government are already aware of the importance of consumer education in relation to the safe and effective use of TM/CAM and have developed consumer education information. It is important to note that such information should make use of engaging pictures and easily understood language so that it is easily accessible to greater portion of the population.

Introduction:

The use of traditional medicine (TM) and complementary alternative medicine (CAM) is increasing throughout the world¹. It account for a major part of the health care provided world wide. In low and middle income countries, up to 80% of the population may rely on TM for their primary health Care needs ². In many high income countries CAM utilization is becoming increasingly popular, with up to 65 % of the population reporting that they have used this form of medicine ³⁻⁴ in response to the challenges posed by the widespread use of TM/CAM, WHO has developed the WHO traditional Medicinal strategy 2002-2005. The strategy has four major objectives

- i Framing Policy
- ii Ensuring safety, efficacy and quality
- iii Enhancing access
- iv Promoting Proper use of TM/ CAM

While these guidelines focus on the issue of Proper TM/CAM therapies are generally available. affordable and commonly used in low- and middle income countries Surveys conducted by the WHO Roll Back Malaria Programme in 1998 showed that in Ghana, Mali, Nigeria and Zambia, more than 60% of children with high fever are treated at home with herbal medicine. ⁵⁻⁸ Many TM/CAM therapies are supported by empirical evidence on safety and effectiveness such evidence is usually based on sources such as traditional scriptures, Pharmacopoeias and / or clinical experience collected over hundred of years. As increasing number of scientific studies now support the use of certain TM/CAM therapies. The effectiveness of acupuncture, a popular treatment for painrelief, has been demonstrated both through numerous clinical trials and laboratory experiment ⁹⁻¹⁰

Artemisinin, a new antimalarial medicine, which is purified from a traditionally used medicinal plant. TM/CAM therapies with a research - derived evidence base are st John's wort(Hypericum perforartum) for mild depression and saw palmetto (Serenoa Repens) for reducing symptoms of benign prostrate hyperplasia¹¹⁻¹². TM/ CAM therapies may cause fewer adverse events than conventional therapies such as treatment with conventional medicines (Pharmacotherapy) A National institute of Health (NIH) panel issued a consensus statement on acupuncture stating that the incidence of adverse effects often lower than the conventional treatment¹³. Another reason

why patients turn to TM/ CAM, for complementary care is the increasing case of chronic and debilitating diseases for which there is no cure. scientific studies of several TM/CAM therapies show that their use is effective. HIV/AIDs and cancer patients 14 -15 As a result UN-AIDs prevention and care in sub- Saharan Africa 16. The advantages of TM/CAM include its diversity and flexibility, its availability and affordability in many parts of the world, its widespread acceptance in low- and middle income countries, its comparatively low cost, and relatively low level of level of technological input required. As a result TM/CAM therapies have the potential to contribute to a better health Care system in many countries. However there is a need for an increase in research to improve the evidence base as regards the efficacy of most TM/CAM therapies. measures needed to facilitate research efforts include the legal recognition of TM/CAM, an increase in funding for research, the development of appropriate research methods for evaluating some TM/CAM therapies, and the development of systems for intellectual property rights protection. TM/CAM medication therapies are commonly used as self care treatments. However, TM/CAM products are unregulated in many countries, and therefore many of the concern. about the risks for consumers relate to the safety and quality of TM/ CAM medicinal products. Reported problems include sales of incorrect plants species and the contamination and adulteration of TM/CAM medication therapies, Heavy metals, fumigation agents, microbials toxins and pharmaceutical substance have been found in. toxic. concentration in. TM/ CAM medications therapies 17-19. Problem involving the use of incorrect plants species and contamination can be prevented by the development and enforcement of herbal medicine regulations and by following good agriculture and collection Practice (GACP) for medicinal plants and good manufacturing practice (GMP) respectively UPPsola monitoring center, a WHO collaborating center that monitor adverse reactions to medicine, has received reports from all over the world on adverse events following the use of TM/CAM medication therapies 20-21. The risks also include adverse events following sub standard practice of the. misuse of TM/CAM by unqualified practioners. It is important to. note that while TM/CAM procedure based therapies are relatively safe, accidents do occasionally occur. when TM/CAM practioners are not fully trained when practioner do. not follow the professional code of ethics, or when. the treatment is not adjusted or modified according to the condition or constitution of the patient. Although serious adverse events following acupuncture, Pneumothorax are rare well documented cases have occurred including fatalities. Incorrect use of TM/CAM medication therapies can have fetal outcomes. The Chinese herbs MA Huang (Ephedra Sinica) which contain ephedrine and is used for breathing problems, has caused heart attack. and strokes among some Americans using it as a dietary supplement. 22. Long term use of Kava kava (Piper Methysticum) can cause serious liver damage 23. and the use of ginko. (Ginko biloba) which stimulates peripheral circulation can result. interactions have been described in. the scientific literature²⁴. as well as in WHO monographs 25-26. Interaction may pose a risk to. patient who use TM/ CAM medication therapies, In conjunction with. conventional drugs. Studies show that many patient use TM/CAM therapies concurrently. with. conventional medicine, often without informing their health care providers 27. Efforts are needed to. improve communication between patients and health care providers and, in the case of self care treatments, to ensure that consumers are better informed In view of the benefits and risk of TM/ CAM therapies, efforts to ensure proper use of TM/CAM 28. Herbal medicine are the most popularly used form of TM/CAM medications therapy. In some countries animal, mineral or other materials may also be used. In these cases, regulations should be specifically tailored to address each country's unique situation. Regulatory system for the quality assurance and registration of herbal medicine will improve the quality of products and enable consumers to use high quality products. Quality control of herbal medicines involves complex issues, which have been described in a series of WHO documents such as Quality control methods for medicinal plant materials. 29. The development of reliable information on. the most commonly used TM/CAM therapies. based on results from. clinical studies and other scientific studies, can offer clinically relevant information about these therapies to guide

TM/CAM practitioners conventional health care providers and the public this will help prevent irrational use and improve the ability of consumers to make informed decisions on TM/CAM use. Adequate training and the licensing of TM/ CAM practitioner will improve safety, promote the credibility of TM/CAM therapies and TM/ CAM providers and enhance consumer trust in their practitioner 30-31. Guidelines for basic training and continuing education of TM/ CAM practitioner have been developed by a number of organizations including WHO and a number of national government and various professional organizations 32. Since conventional health care practitioners are sometimes sceptical about TM/ CAM treatment, there is often a communication barrier between the consumers and doctors improved communication between TM/ CAM consumers and their different health care providers, and their different health care providers, may promote greater trust between patient and providers and reduce the risks of adverse events and interactions in patient using TM/ CAM medication therapies or using procedure based therapies in conjunction with conventional treatment.

Conclusion:

There are both benefits and risks associated with the use of TM/CAM, as highlighted by a number of recent reports therefore it is important to ensure that appropriate information is made available to consumers to enable them to maximize the benefits of TM/CAM while minimizing the risks. A number of elements should be taken into account when developing consumer information. TM/CAM Therapies are often linked to the culture from which they have originated, and their use out of the original context can be a source of misunderstanding and /or improper use. Each country has a different health care system and different pattern of utilization of TM/ CAM by consumers. Therefore consumer information on TM/ CAM needs to be tailored to specific country need. Although consumer information cannot compensate for poor TM/ CAM products or inadequate TM/ CAM practices. It can help consumers gain increased knowledge about the benefits and potential risks of TM/ CAM therapies and where to find reliable source of information. Public information about TM/CAM serve the purpose of spreading knowledge about the health benefits of TM/CAM as well as the potential risk. It is important that information strategies provide a well balanced message containing reliable, well - supported information tailored to the specific local context.

A recent report from HongKong SAR, China, on the impact of a number of publicity measures in reducing the incidence of herb- induced aconitine poisoning underlines the effectiveness of public information campaign about the risk involved in the use of TM/ CAM 33. Experience from public education strategies promoting rational use of public interventions for behavioral change³⁴. The importance of developing and disseminating reliable TM/CAM information has been addressed in a number of reports 35-36. WHO has proposed six steps for the development of effective communication strategies Promoting rational drug use

i investigation

ii Active Planning

iii Development of materials

iv Material testing and revising

v Activity implementation and monitoring

vi Activity evaluation and reassessment WHO 2002 It is recommended that stakeholders developing information promoting proper use of TM/CAM should pay attention to all six steps, possibly with guidance from WHO work on the promotion of rational use of medicines. The structure of the health system in the country is important for the development of information about TM/CAM as it may determine the need for information as well as the kind of information suitable for different groups

The extent to which TM/ CAM is an officially recognised element of health Care depends largely on the structure of the health Care system in individual countries. WHO has identified three types of health system, structure in relation to TM/ CAM, an integrative health system, an inclusive health system and a tolerant health system. In an integrative health system, China, The Republic of Korea and Vietnam TM/ CAM is officially recognised and incorporated into all areas of health care provision. There are series of regulations and registration to control the safety, efficacy and quality of herbal medicine products. The TM doctors must receive a university education which includes both knowledge of TM and modern medicine, and they must be licensed to practice. Patient/ consumers are free to consult both TM/CAM Providers and medical doctors, the health insurance system covers both forms of treatment, and there are no communication barriers between TM/CAM practitioner and medical doctors.. The government often provides consumer education. The other systems are an inclusive health system, which recognised TM/ CAM, but not yet incorporated it into all aspects of health care, Health Care delivery education and training, regulation of research. This situation exist in many countries including

Australia, Canada, Germany, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Iran, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mali, Singapore, Switzerland, Thailand, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, and The United states in a tolerant health system, Health care is based entirely on convential medicine and TM/ CAM practices are not officially recognised as therapeutic methods or as health enhancement practices within the national health Care system. At present, most countries have a health system structure that belong to this third category. The type of information developed will have to address the specific needs demanded by the individual health system.

The context in which a surveillance system function will determine the appropriate structure of the system, Including the means of reporting for instance, different pathway of reporting may be used for TM/CAM medication therapies depending on their Mode of delivery, as proposed in Guidelines of the safety monitoring and Pharmacovigilance of herbal medicine. 37. Informative and educational approaches can also be made available through schools. wherever possible, national authorities should support the use of reliable and independent educational materials targeted to young consumers. Both printed materials and videos can be effective outreach stratiges for use in schools. Information can also be provided to consumers through consumer organizations and other NGOs working in the field of TM/ CAM. Although the Internet offers easy access and wider Target audience, the disadvantages include lack of access by the poor and the fact. that electronic communication and publishing is not always reliable 38. To encounter these problems several approaches can be used, including a website controlled by national or local authorities or by officially approved. TM/CAM organizations, and the use of certified sites on the Internet where the information has been approved by TM/CAM or organization and consumer organization.

The regulations for TM/ CAM therapies, there is also a need for regulations controlling TM/ CAM related information and advertisement. Such regulations can be issued either by national authorities. In the form of statutory control or by local organization such as professional organizations, In the form of voluntary control. these kind of regulations such as these recommended by the World Health Medication industry³⁹ may control the reliability and ethical content of the information, prevent false health claims and misleading advertisement and ensure the appropriate labelling of TM/ CAM products consumer's need to know where and how to find and freely access reliable, TM/CAM information 40. WHO has published guidelines entitled Medical products and the Internet, a guide to finding guidelines could also be used for finding reliable information on TM/CAM 41. Many members states have regulatory agencies or licensing boards for certain types of TM/CAM practitioner and therapies that may also provide information about evidence and claims⁴²⁻⁴³ Identification of the products/ active ingredient is an important step when assuring the quality of most TM/CAM medication products It involves

identification of the plant/ animal species, including minerals and vitamins when relevant through botanical verifications it is also important to check the quantitative composition and the local and scientific or equivalent national terminologies name of all ingredients 44.

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