

**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION  
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC**



**REPORT**

**WORKING GROUP ON  
HERBAL MEDICINES**

**Manila, Philippines  
8-12 December 1997**

**Manila, Philippines  
March 1998**

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**WORKING GROUP ON HERBAL MEDICINES**

**Convened by:**

**WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION**  
**REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC**  
**Manila, Philippines**  
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## NOTE

**The views expressed in this report are those of the participants in the Working Group Meeting and do not necessarily reflect the policy of the World Health Organization.**

**This report has been prepared by the Regional Office for the Western Pacific of the World Health Organization for governments of Member States in the Region and for the participants in the meeting of the Working Group on Herbal Medicines held in the Western Pacific Regional Office, Manila, Philippines, from 8 to 12 December 1997.**

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Key words

Medicine, Herbal / Medicine, Traditional / Philippines

## SUMMARY

The Working Group on Herbal Medicines met in Manila, Philippines, from 8 to 12 December 1997. The main objective of the meeting was to develop guidelines for the appropriate use of herbal medicines for interested countries in the Region which would assist in the development of national policies and programmes on herbal medicines.

The meeting was attended by 17 temporary advisers, two consultants, two secretariat staff from the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific and three observers. Dr Wong Kum Leng was elected Chairman, Mrs Napsah binti Mahmud, the Vice-Chairman and Dr Nelia Cortes-Maramba and Dr Boun Hoong Southavong were the two Rapporteurs.

The meeting commenced with presentations from the two consultants and one secretariat member. These presentations briefly summarized:

- (1) the Regional growth of herbal medicine and relevant WHO policies and programmes;
- (2) the regulation of herbal medicine in the Region; and
- (3) progress in herbal medicine research.

Dr S.T. Han, WHO's Regional Director for the Western Pacific, delivered a speech during the opening ceremony. Country reports on the status and activity of herbal medicine were then presented by the temporary advisers.

On subsequent days, significant focus was given to identifying the essential principles behind the development of any national policy and programme in herbal medicine, and key issues relevant to the regulation of herbal medicines and herbal medicine practitioners. In the course of these discussions, the Working Group developed the guidelines for the appropriate use of herbal medicines.

A summary of the principal conclusions and recommendations follows:

- (1) With the growing use of herbal medicines in the Region, it is becoming important for Member States to formulate their own national policy and programme on herbal medicine.
- (2) The guidelines for the appropriate use of herbal medicines, developed by the Working Group, are to be utilized fully or partially by Member States, depending on each country's own situation and distinct needs.
- (3) Herbal medicines, especially traditional herbal medicines, will increasingly need to meet basic standards of quality control and safety. Member States are encouraged to work towards this as part of their national programme on herbal medicine.
- (4) Bilateral and multilateral cooperation among Member States and with WHO are essential to harmonize regulatory standards across Member States and to facilitate exchange of information.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Herbal medicine in traditional medical practice is an important resource which can be mobilized for the attainment of the common goal of health for all. These herbal medicines have contributed significantly to man's struggle against diseases and maintenance of health. In recent years, interest in the use of herbal preparations has increased. Herbal medicines are used in most countries in the Region either within the state health care system or in communities and private practices outside the state system. The growing interest in, and the increased consumption of herbal preparations as herbal medicines have also raised considerations about the need for regulation. Special attention to the nature and characteristics of herbal medicines is warranted in forming regulatory provisions and procedures.

The consumption of herbal medicines is significant and appears to be steadily increasing for a number of countries in the Region. In rural China, 35% of outpatients and 22% of inpatients are treated with traditional medicines. Herbal medicine sales accounted for 33.1% of the drug market in 1995, and represented a greater than 200% increase on production levels of 1990. In Hong Kong, 60% of the population have consulted traditional medicine practitioners. Japan saw a 15-fold increase in herbal medicine sales between 1979 and 1989 in contrast to a 2.6 fold increase in sales of pharmaceutical drugs during the same period. In Australia, a recent survey identified 48.5% of Australians as using alternative medicines, including herbal medicine. The consumption of herbal medicines does not appear to be abating.

WHO's policy on herbal medicines acknowledges their important role for the health of a large number of people. For particular cultural and socioeconomic groups, they form a significant part of their health services. WHO promotes the safe and effective use of herbal medicines and encourages their integration, wherever possible, into the delivery of mainstream health care services.

### 1.1 Objectives

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- (1) review the current status of the appropriate use of herbal medicines in the Region;
- (2) present and discuss various issues and models for the appropriate use of herbal preparations as herbal medicines;
- (3) develop draft guidelines for the appropriate use of herbal medicines; and
- (4) recommend future directions for the implementation of these guidelines.

### 1.2 Participants

The Working Group was composed of 17 temporary advisers, two consultants, two secretariat staff from the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific and three observers. The list of participants is attached as Annex 1.

### 1.3 Organization

Dr Wong Kum Leng and Mrs Napsah binti Mahmud were elected Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Working Group. Dr Nelia Cortes-Maramba and Dr Boun Hoong Southavong were the two Rapporteurs.

#### 1.4 Opening ceremony

Dr S.T. Han, Regional Director for the Western Pacific, opened the meeting by pointing out that WHO recognizes the very significant contribution which traditional medicine, and in particular herbal medicine, can make to public health in the Region. He reported on the high usage figures for herbal medicines in the Region, the capacity of plant materials to offer new drugs and successful medical treatment, and the degree of integration into the official health care system of herbal medicine by some Member States. Dr Han indicated that WHO fully supports Member States in their efforts to integrate traditional medicine into their health care delivery systems. He noted that the Working Group, in preparing guidelines for the appropriate use of herbal medicines, should include technical suggestions for Member States interested in promoting the proper use of herbal medicine, which are flexible, feasible and practical.

Dr S.T. Han's opening speech is attached as Annex 2.

## 2. PROCEEDINGS

The agenda of the Working Group is shown in Annex 3.

#### 2.1 Initial presentations

The meeting commenced with presentations from the two consultants and one secretariat member. These presentations briefly summarized:

- the Regional growth of herbal medicine and relevant WHO policies and programmes;
- the regulation of herbal medicine in the Region; and
- progress in herbal medicine research.

Dr Chen Ken, WHO Medical Officer for Traditional Medicine, outlined the current status of herbal medicines in the WHO Western Pacific Region and drew the Working Group's attention to growth statistics from a number of countries and areas. It was identified that:

- A great number of people in the Region still use herbal medicine for various reasons.

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