

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC



REPORT

SCIENTIFIC GROUP ON HERBAL MEDICINE RESEARCH

Tokyo, Japan

10-12 March 1986

Manila, Philippines

October 1986

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SCIENTIFIC GROUP ON HERBAL MEDICINE RESEARCH

Convened by the
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC
OF THE
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
Tokyo, Japan, 10-12 March 1986

Not for sale

Printed and Distributed

by the

Regional Office for the Western Pacific of the
World Health Organization
Manila, Philippines
October 1986

WHO/
Manila, Philippines

NOTE

The views expressed in this report are those of the participants in the meeting of the Scientific Group on Herbal Medicine Research and do not necessarily reflect the policies of the Organization.

This report has been prepared by the Regional Office for the Western Pacific of the World Health Organization for the governments of Member States in the Region and for the participants in the meeting of the Scientific Group on Herbal Medicine Research which was held in Tokyo, Japan, from 10 to 12 March 1986.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The thirty sixth session of the Regional Committee adopted a resolution on traditional medicine (WPR/RC36.R6) which, inter alia, urges Member States to "undertake research in herbal medicine and acupuncture as indicated by the status of development of these technologies", and requests the Regional Director to encourage and support the conduct of research, including the investigation and evaluation of the efficacy and safety of herbal therapies".

Herbal medicine is one of the important resources which may be mobilized for the attainment of health for all by the year 2000. It has contributed significantly to man's struggle against disease and has been an important component of his health care system for thousands of years.

Herbal medicine has a long history, particularly in the Western Pacific Region, and its efficacy and safety can be explained partly by the fact that it has withstood the test of time. However, more accurate and complete knowledge of the efficacy and safety of herbal medicine should be developed based on scientific methodology.

With a view to further promoting the development of research methodology in herbal medicine, a meeting of the Scientific Group on Herbal Medicine Research was conducted in Tokyo, Japan, from 10 to 12 March 1986.

To coincide with this meeting of the Scientific Group as well as with the eleventh session of the Western Pacific Advisory Committee on Medical Research (WPACMR) in Tokyo (11-15 March 1986), a ceremony was held on 8 March 1986 for the inauguration of the Oriental Medicine Research Centre (OMRC) of the Kitasato Institute, Tokyo as a WHO Collaborating Centre for Traditional Medicine.

1.2 Objectives of the Scientific Group

The overall aim of the Scientific Group was to discuss and make recommendations on the promotion of research on herbal medicine. Three specific objectives were laid down:

- (1) to review and discuss recent advances in herbal medicine research;
- (2) to discuss appropriate research methodology to be applied in herbal medicine research;
- (3) to identify priority areas in herbal medicine research.

2. ORGANIZATION OF THE SCIENTIFIC GROUP

2.1 Participants

Twenty temporary advisers, including three members the WPACMR, from eight countries or areas, three special advisers, one consultant, fifteen observers and five members of the WHO secretariat attended the meeting (See Annex 1).

2.2 Opening session

The Regional Director, Dr Hiroshi Nakajima, in his opening remarks, (see Annex 3), drew attention to the previous efforts of WHO in the field of herbal medicine. He also stressed the necessity of herbal medicine research based on scientific methodology.

2.3 Selection of officers

Following self-introductions by the participants, the officers were selected as follows: Dr Yasuo Otsuka, Chairman, Dr Xiao Peigen, Vice-Chairman and Dr Jesusa Concha, Rapporteur.

2.4 Agenda

The first two-and-a-half days were devoted to eleven presentations on various topics of herbal medicine, from basic to clinical fields, followed by discussions. The second half of the third day was devoted to round table discussions (See Annex 2).

2.5 Working documents

Ten technical papers and other supplementary materials were presented and served as a basis for subsequent discussions. (See Annexes 4 - 13.)

2.6 Closing session

Following the adoption of the recommendations, Dr Otsuka, Chairman, thanked the participants for their valuable contributions to the meeting. Dr Nakajima delivered the closing remarks.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Summaries of technical presentations

3.1.1 An overview of herbal medicine research in the WHO Western Pacific Region, by Dr K. Tsutani, WHO consultant for traditional medicine (See Annex 4.)

Dr Tsutani reviewed the situation of the existing systems of herbal medicine, herbal medicine research and the results of previous WHO meetings on herbal medicine. He pointed out that there were in the Region many systems of herbal medicine, including highly developed systems and simple

systems. There was a wide variety of fields of herbal medicine research, which could be classified under five main groups - raw materials, laboratory studies, quality control, clinical studies and literature. WHO's role in this regard was to coordinate and collaborate in strengthening research activities among countries in the Region and in collecting and disseminating information on these activities in the effort to mobilize herbal medicine for the attainment of health for all by the year 2000.

3.1.2 Role of the pharmacological approach in the revival of herbal medicine by Dr J.C. Cyong, WHO consultant (See Annex 5.)

Dr Cyong reported that pharmacological studies on the therapeutic basis of traditional medical prescriptions had been largely responsible for the revival of traditional medicine, particularly in Japan, where pharmaceutical research focused on finding new substances in consonance with the regulatory functions of the body without leading to adverse effects. Recognition of the drug concept in traditional medicine was different from that of modern medicine, and showed the advantages of the traditional medicine concept of drugs in health care.

Traditional medicine was useful in helping the body to maintain its regulatory functions.

He expressed confidence that the pharmacological approach to herbal medicine would be able to bridge the gap in understanding between traditional and modern medicines, and eventually lead to an integration of the two systems.

Dr Ada asked whether the existence of immuno-stimulating substances was common in herbal medicines. Dr Ada added that many sulfated polysaccharides influenced the migration process of immune competent cells. Dr Cyong replied that herbs containing immuno-stimulating polysaccharides could be specified because the pharmacological activity of polysaccharides was related to the microheterogeneity of the chemical structure.

Dr Shibata asked for some clarification on terminology, such as "anti-complementary activity". Dr Cyong explained that there was both suppression and inhibition by activation of complement. The latter

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