Traditional, Complementary and Alternative Medicine—Policy and Public Health Perspectives

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The demand for traditional medicine, as well as its practice, have expanded in recent decades well beyond their historically localized geographic and cultural contexts. Migration of rural populations to growing urban centers, particularly in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and a surge of interest in traditional, alternative and complementary medicine (TCAM), especially in Europe and North America, have prompted governments and international organizations to recognize the important role of traditional and complementary medicine and the need to ensure the safety and quality of these health care services for the public. The development of effective policies and regulatory approaches towards these ends requires, as it does for biomedical health policy, an understanding and consideration of traditional and complementary medicine’s social, cultural and political dimensions, issues related to ethics and equity, sustainability of financing, knowledge generation and management, capacity building for TCAM, and support for research.

Building on the results of the WHO Global Atlas of Traditional, Complementary and Alternative Medicine, the editors and their 20 collaborating authors have made an important contribution with this book. Its wide-ranging policy-related chapters summarize the available literature and analyze trends across key issues such as regulation, education, safety, and finance within the TCAM sector, evaluate public health models, policy approaches, and non-governmental organization (NGO) programs, and discuss innovative developments within the TCAM sector worldwide.

Part 1 of the volume is comprised of nine comprehensive overviews and analyses of policy-relevant topics ranging from local initiatives to strengthen traditional medicine through conservation of medicinal plant resources, development of home herbal gardens in southern India, traditional health care among Burmese refugees in Thailand, and public-private partnerships in TCAM in Kenya and Tanzania, to global overviews of TCAM financing, training, policies and regulatory frameworks in Asia, Europe and North America.

The second part of the book includes five chapters that review and critically evaluate the current literature, experiences and research and development initiatives on traditional and complementary treatments for priority diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, traditional orthopedics, and dermatology. The final section of the book includes three chapters dealing with the complex issues and challenges faced by the TCAM research community: development of clinical trial methodologies for herbal drugs that respect both the concepts of traditional systems of medicine and those of modern (biomedical) clinical research; ethical issues in research on traditional and complementary medicine; and intellectual property rights—the challenges at the global and national levels to safeguard the rights of indigenous and local communities to control their traditional biodiversity-based medical knowledge while finding innovative ways to equitably share the benefits of such knowledge in pursuit of its broader application through commercialization and use of plant drugs or their derivatives by the herbal sector, pharmaceutical companies, and health care providers and planners.

This highly readable and informative book is a useful addition to the growing literature on traditional, complementary and alternative medicine. Its focus on policy and public health issues, particularly in relation to traditional medicine in Asia and Africa and alternative and complementary medicine in North America and Europe, make this book unique and will hopefully encourage further work in this very important field at the interface of public health science and policy. It is highly recommended for scholars and research scientists in the fields of traditional, alternative and complementary medicine, public health policy experts, and anyone interested in the future of global health care and the need to ensure the availability, quality and safety of traditional and complementary treatments.
REFERENCE


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