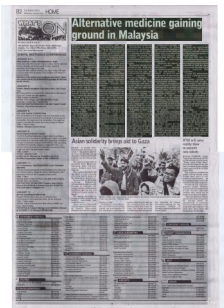


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Alternative medicine gaining ground in Malaysia

SHAH ALAM: Alternative medicine is increasingly gaining acceptance among Malaysians in not only maintaining good health but also in treating ailments.

In Malaysia, the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and the Indian Ayurveda and Siddha medicine are respectively the most common alternative remedy to conventional medicine for the Chinese and Indian communities.

The president of the Malaysian Society for Complementary Medicine (MSCM) Dr Lee Chee Pheng remarked that no one wants to fall sick and the side effects of conventional drugs were pushing the society towards herbal medicine that is relatively harmless.

"Based on the market demand, TCM is the fastest growing industry in the world," said Dr Lee when met at the recent 4th World Ayurveda Congress and Arogya Expo 2010 in Bangalore, India.

Dr Lee led a nine-member team from MSCM to the event considered the world's biggest on complementary and alternative healthcare. It was organised by India's

Department of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH), the Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council

(Pharmexcil) and the Government of Karnataka.

Concurring with Dr Lee, Dr. V.M. Palaniappan a leading practitioner of alternative medicine and author of numerous books on the subject noted that the ancient Ayurveda and Siddha medicine too have been gaining popularity in Malaysia with many Ayurvedic centres cropping up over the last decade.

"I have a strong feeling that Ayurvedic system is fast picking up in Malaysia, and I will not be surprised if more people begin to seek remedies through this method.

"One of the reasons why people opt for alternative medicine appears to be the presence of undesirable side effects of chemical-based drugs used in modern medicine," said this former academician with Universiti Malaya.

Another reason for people seeking treatment using alternative method is the cost factor. It is a lot cheaper," said the pioneering founder of an evidence and science based alternative medicine called Ecological Healing System (EHS).

Dr Palani observed that in general people spend lots of money to manage their health through conventional methods, yet often end up suffering without any

solution to their health woes.

Nevertheless, at present alternative medicine in Malaysia is still at infancy and awaiting guidelines to regulate the sector and integrate alternative/complimentary medicine into the National Healthcare System.

The Health Ministry is to introduce the TCM Act, which is expected to be effective by next year, that would provide guidelines to better regulate TCM practices in Malaysia.

Once the TCM Act is implemented, all TCM practitioners will have to register with the ministry before they can offer their services.

But this has created some uneasiness among the practitioners like pointed out by Dr Lee and Dr Palani.

Both related that the practitioners were very much concerned of the upcoming TCM Act as they were not clear on its content.

"Is it going to restrict the growth of TCM practitioners? Who is going to instruct and train new practitioners? Who is going to decide as who is scientific and who is not? The TCM Act appears to talk only about the science behind the treatment method and the like. One should remember that the traditional medicine originates from the kitchen," he said.

Commenting further on the matter, Dr Palani pointed out the qualities of the conventional medicine could only be evaluated by their practitioners and researchers and the same goes to the traditional medication.

"Moreover the subject is very complex. The alternative medical practitioners can only judge by the end-results," he added. As such, he said, proponents of conventional medicine should not be the one to evaluate the qualities of alternative medicine.

Dr Palani is thankful that the government is liberal in allowing the Ayurvedic and several other traditional medical systems to be practiced in Malaysia.

"Due to the many similarities in the climatic conditions, food and culture between Malaysia and India, the Ayurveda as well as the Siddha systems may suit the people of Malaysia very well", he said.

In developing alternative medicine here, Dr Lee noted that India is willing to cooperate with Malaysia to explore the potential of our natural herbs.

In this respect Dr Lee invited the National Institute of Unani Medicine (NIUM) in Bangalore, India, to undertake joint research on natural herbs with the Forest Research Institute of

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Malaysia.

“Many use traditional medicine in Malaysia. However, adequate research and development appears to be still lacking.”

Dr Lee felt that the government so far has given encouragement and support for research works to tap the potential of TCM but have yet to extend the same to the Indian medicine like

Ayurveda.

“I hope the government will give a helping hand to develop Ayurvedic traditional system of medicine as well,” he said.

Meanwhile, V. Devindran the head of Head of Technical Team of Bigcorp-A Berhad, a subsidiary of LITNA (M) Sdn Bhd, during the congress said Indian companies specializing in Ayurveda pharmaceutical formulations have shown interest in conducting research and trials on health products to treat common diseases affecting Malaysians.

“We have already conducted research and clinical trials on testing gymnema sylvestre, a plant used in India for treating diabetes. We are in the final stage to launch our company’s Gymnema Extract in softgel capsules by this year. We hope the gymnema capsules will give a solution to treat diabetes,” he added. - Bernama