



# Pat-MedMUNC III WHO

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## *Integrating Modern Medicine into Areas Using Traditional Medicine*

Traditional medicine is the sum total of knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures that are used to maintain health, as well as to prevent, diagnose, improve or treat physical and mental illnesses. Traditional medicine is very prevalent in our world today, especially in developing countries. In some Asian and African countries, 80% of the population depends on traditional medicine for primary health care. Herbal medicines are the most lucrative form of traditional medicine, generating billions of dollars in revenue. While studies have shown that some forms of traditional medicine are effective in treating some specific conditions, there are many risk factors involved. Many people believe that because medicines are herbal (natural) or traditional they are safe. However, traditional medicines and practices can cause harmful and adverse reactions if the product or therapy is of poor quality, taken inappropriately or in conjunction with other medicines. If the person administering the traditional medicine is not properly trained (as is often the case in some areas of underdeveloped countries), the risks are multiplied.

It is the job of the WHO to integrate more reliable, modern medicine into these areas, while not offending the cultural or religious beliefs involved in traditional medicine. There are many pressing challenges in this issue. One is the matter of affordability and accessibility. Many people in developing countries turn to the use of traditional medicine because that is all that is available to them, or all they can afford. Modern medicine must be integrated into these areas in a manner that is inexpensive, accessible, and affordable.

Another issue arises when the factors of cultural beliefs and norms are taken into perspective. Many of the people who primarily rely on traditional medicine do so because their culture tells them that it is the most effective way to treat illness. Educating these people on which traditional medicines work, which don't, and which conditions are more effectively treated through modern medicine is very necessary. However, one must always remember that such education needs to be culture-sensitive, and cannot offend the traditions of any peoples.

Also, it must be taken into account that even with the integration of modern medicine; traditional medicine will not simply disappear. Being deeply rooted into the peoples' cultures and beliefs, traditional medicine will still exist. To minimize the risks involved, nations whose citizens rely heavily on traditional medicine should take actions to regulate it, and integrate it into their formal health care systems. The WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy (2002-2005) deals with this exact concept. Through formal regulation, nations can more effectively find a balance between traditional and modern medicine, and can help traditional medicine to reach its full potential as a safe and healthy alternative to modern medicine.

### *Points to Consider*

- Does your country have many citizens who use/depend on traditional medicine?
- Is traditional medicine part of the beliefs of your country's citizens?
- Do your citizens employ dangerous traditional medicines?
- Has your country already done anything to make modern medicine available to its citizens?
- What is the average economic status of your country's citizens, and how will that affect your ability to make modern medicine affordable to your citizens?