

## **STRATEGY FOR TCM DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF TCM IN THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM**

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During the last 30 years there have been big changes at an international, national and local level, in the background in which frame all values of the health care should be translated into measures. In the following study our main aim is to carry out a strategic planning for the development of the TCM in China, without forgetting that China has to lead also the development of the TCM at a global level.

Firstly it is to point out that a health care system is embraced by all those organizations, institutions and resources aimed to develop initiatives in order to improve health care. In China, the context of its Health Care System includes both the Traditional Chinese Medicine as the allopathic or western medicine, and also other traditional medicines featured by a more minority character. In this study we are going to concentrate in the Traditional Chinese Medicine without forgetting the possible conflicts of interest with the other medicines. Starting from the basic point that the TCM has to play a main role in the Health Care System of China, the objective is to be able to establish some strategies to make it possible.

In a globalised world, we can never forget all the recommendations and proposals of the World Health Organization (WHO) regarding the discussed topic. Although in China there exist own features which are very different from other countries' and which have to be taken into account, the strategic lines cannot miss the international tendencies in the subject in a more and more globalised environment. For that reason we will take into account the Declaration of Alma-Ata adopted by the World Health Organization in 1978,

since nowadays, 30 years later, its values and principles do still receive a strong international support. In the mentioned Declaration, the Primary Health Care became the central policy of the WHO. Consequently we encounter a strategy of development of a Health Care System that mainly concerns on the Primary Health Care, understanding a Primary Health Care System as the institutions, the people and the resources involved in the health care assistance for individuals.

It is necessary to understand the Primary Health Care as a concept regarding all main principles as a variable group of basic activities. In this sense we have adopted the principles advocated by the WHO as our main principles:

- A. Universal access to the health care and coverage depending on the special needs.
- B. Adhesion to the health equity as part of a development directed to the social justice.
- C. Participation in the community in the definition and application of the health agencies.
- D. Intersectorial approaches of health.

Obviously these principles remain valid and concern both the Traditional Chinese Medicine and the other traditional medicines and the allopathic medicine.

We should not forget the existing conflicts of interest and others that could arise in the future between the different operators of the Health Care System in China, as a consequence of the different medicines operating in it. In our opinion, the way to minimize the before mentioned conflicts consists in the establishment of a well-defined strategy of development for each of the medicines, granting all them with enough autonomy as to define its own development and at the same time, permitting the creation of integrative policies between them.

It is obvious that the point of view that we defend lies on the idea that the TCM has to configure an own and autonomous Health Care System inside the Health Care System of China, and we also defend that there have to be adopted particular policies and provide it with all necessary resources in order to turn the TCM Health Care System into the predominant System in China.

Our attitude is based on the fact that the TCM has shown its efficacy and efficiency in the health care of the Chinese citizens for many centuries and it is also perfectly integrated in the Chinese culture. It is also to mention that the world population ageing tendency requires a more preventive medicine, main feature of the TCM, apart from its shown efficacy in the treatment of chronic illnesses, which are becoming more and more usual. In addition, the growth of the TCM in many countries of the world, abroad the area of influence of the Chinese culture, discloses a potential of growth that will only become sustainable and will consolidate if the TCM Health Care System in China is able to play a leading role at an international level.

Leaving the analysis of a health care strategy in the Chinese authorities hands at the highest level, we want to underline some of the parameters that are to be taken into account for the design of a strategy for the development of the TCM in China under the premise that our basis lies in a Health Care System based in the TCM, without excluding other health care systems, also autonomous, of the other medicines.

The problematic that we will have face according to the proposed TCM Health Care System, in general terms, does not differ much from the problematic that we would have to face in any other health care system of many of the countries of the world:

- a) The chronic lack of enough financing.
- b) The many forms of inefficiency undermining the system.

- c) The shortage of health staff, the lack of adequacy of its education and training to the real needs and its emigration to urban areas, of the same country and also to more developed countries.
- d) The lack of appropriate health care information.

Evidently the current Health Care Systems are affected by the changes in the population (ageing, food habits, pollution...and so on), more exigent citizens, the increase of chronic illnesses, more expensive treatments, and so on. These factors generate a progressive increase in the costs and in the demand of health care. Besides, these are joined with other factors that, though the will of change of the government, mean a restraint to transformation, as it is the exigency of a budget balance, the lack of homogenation and health care standards that obstruct the obtaining of data for the evaluation of the assistance practice, the short term urgency that obliges to make investments that would turn out to be long term investments, the less healthy habits of citizens... Apart from the fact that the government should display a more decisive policy to increase the volume of resources concerning the TCM Health Care System, there should be initiated a process of transformation based in the value, investing in order to favour an assistance aimed in the prevention and the proactivity with the patients, with a higher involvement of the citizens and developing best options to promote health and to provide the health care assistance. We do not have to forget that many of the functions of the health care systems are conditioned to the previous achievement of an adequate financing. If there are not created sustainable mechanisms of financing, the innovative ideas direct towards the reinforcement of the health care systems will not generate the expected results.

Taking into account the changes produced in the institutional context of the planning regarding health care policies and the TCM Health Care System supply, if there exists the determined motivation to bet for the reinforcement of a TCM Health Care System, we consider that the responsibilities and targets should be redefined. For that a committee of experts should be entrusted with the development of a white book in which they should propose a strategy for the

following years. Then the appropriate policies should be established from the mentioned strategy, foreseeing the needed financing, establishing the targets to achieve and redesigning the system, improving its efficacy and its efficiency. All along this process it should be necessary to count with the participation and implication of all TCM health care operators, from the educative to the health care institutions, and from system suppliers to associations of professionals.

Another of the delicate problems which is to be faced by the TCM Health Care System is the shortage of staff to make it work properly. We are living in an economic and politic environment which has experienced a great functional increase in Health Care from non-governmental organizations and private suppliers. In addition, all countries are already part of the world market of health care professionals and the effects of the imbalance between offer and demand will become more and more significant in accordance with the increase of the trade with health care services. It is accordingly necessary to develop and evaluate new models to reinforce health care staff. We also have to add other factors as the profile of aptitudes of the health care professionals, its geographic and functional distribution and its productivity. Moreover, the emigration of health care staff worries those planning policies in all countries. The movements of health care professionals reproduce accurately the general emigration patterns of professionals. Although doctors and nurses constitute only a small proportion of the professional emigrants, these loses weaken the health care system. We think that in the field of the TCM this tendency will be increasing in the following years and, consequently, it must be foreseen. There have to be adopted policies on retribution, promotion and incentives to allow the decrease of the problem and, moreover, the health care suppliers should think about investing in health care in the countries that receive the TCM health care professionals, as to be able to take part in the benefits, and to be able to establish rotating policies of its health care professionals. The process of the establishment of a workforce motivated by the pertinent aptitudes can commence immediately with the existing budgets and staff, but these activities require also continuing investments in time and leading matters. The reorientation of the managing staff to new functions developments requires time

and planning. To take measures to resolve the crisis of the staff is not an easy task and obliges to pay attention to all aspects of the needs of the staff, from its education to its mood, and from local to global determinants. The design, the approval and the implementation of changes in institutions, the policies and the legislation requires studies and analysis that take time and that will have repercussions, visible only at medium term. It is necessary to consider seriously the dynamic nature of the work market and to acknowledge the limits and expectations at long term for health care workers.

Concerning the lack of proper health care information, it is important to comment that added to the before mentioned lack of staff there exists a risk of collapse of the Health Care System. The management of the TCM Health Care System requires a tough system of health care information in order to understand the needs of the population concerning health. This system of information must allow checking the proper working of the programmes, seizing the effects of the interventions and evaluating and improving its performance. The tools and structures assigned to obtain, organize and share information are indispensable to improve the task of each of the suppliers of health care and to increase the quality of the entire system. For the WHO, a system of health care information can be defined as an integrated effort of gathering, processing, notification and use of health care information and knowledge with the objective to influence on the policy making, on the programmatic action and on research.

Health care information has to be employed at least with four different though related objectives: the strategic decision making, the application or management of programmes, the monitoring of results or achievements and the evaluation of what works and what does not work. The strategic decision making of the planners of health care policies should be based in the best available evidence. The use of new technologies in a well-designed system enables a more precise and opportune monitoring of the programmes.

To conclude, just underline that the perspective to develop a TCM Health Care System has to assure the universal access to a service of quality. The universal

coverage of the TCM will ensure that the general improvement of the Health Care System of China avoids the imbalances in health care. Future offers bigger challenges for the Health Care System of China. In the next years, the environment changes will have effects on the population health by mechanisms that are not completely understood yet. The Health Care System of China is already fighting against the effects of the economic globalisation, including the migrations and the impact of trade patterns and practices in the health care of the population. While in the international forums there will continue the debates about issues as the copyrights and the trading with services, the health care systems will face new pressures. In this context, the steady adherence to the values of equity and universal access to assistance, will become more important than ever.

In case that the Chinese authorities assign the necessary resources and establish a strategy that allows, at medium term, the achievement of a health care system based on TCM featured by its effectiveness, equity and universal access, they will not only benefit all the population of China, but they will also turn into a world reference. This will permit the exportation of the model to other countries, achieving important benefits in addition to the improvement of the health of the population in those countries.

We consider that in this plan there have to be implied all health care operators from government and non-government organizations to the professionals themselves through their organizations without forgetting the TCM Universities and education institutes, pharmaceutical laboratories suppliers of TCM, the Commerce Chamber, editorials specialized in TCM, TCM institutes and research centres, and definitively all those who can contribute, as we, to the development of the TCM in China and in the world.



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