

Necessity of Controlling the System for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), Especially Focusing on Traditional Chinese Medicine in the Republic of North Macedonia

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Abstract

The regulation of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), including practices such as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), homeopathy, chiropractic, ayurveda, yoga, bioinformatics, reiki, aromatherapy, hidzama – wet cupping etc. is an emerging priority in the Republic of North Macedonia. Despite the adoption of the Law on Complementary and Alternative Medicine in 2015, updated in 2021, full implementation remains lacking. This paper explores the historical framework supporting CAM regulation, international agreements that support TCM development in Republic of North Macedonia, the role of professional associations such as Tong Da Tang TCM Skopje, and the urgent need to establish a Chamber for CAM Practitioners which, according to the CAM law, should have been established 9 years ago to ensure safety, professionalism, and patient trust in CAM practices. This paper offers recommendations for fully integrating CAM into Macedonia's healthcare system.

Introduction

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) is a growing sector in global healthcare, including in the Republic of North Macedonia, where practices such as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), homeopathy, chiropractic, yoga bioinformatics, reiki, aromatherapy, hidzama – wet cupping etc. are gaining acceptance. The Law on Complementary and Alternative Medicine, passed in 2015 and revised through 2021, provides a legal framework for the regulation of CAM. However, the full realization of this law requires decisive steps from the Ministry of Health, particularly the establishment of a Chamber for CAM Practitioners. This body would ensure professional standards, ethical conduct, and the continued development of CAM professionals while promoting public trust in these practices.

Historical Framework Supporting CAM Regulation

The legal regulation of CAM in North Macedonia finds its foundation in international collaborations, particularly with China in the field of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Several high-level agreements between the Republic of North Macedonia and the People's Republic of China have established TCM as a key area of healthcare cooperation. In 2002, an agreement on health and medical cooperation between the two nations was ratified, with a focus on TCM. This partnership was further solidified in 2006, when the Macedonian Ministry of Health signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with China's State Administration for Traditional Chinese Medicine.

Further diplomatic efforts in 2013 and 2014 expanded this cooperation. During these years, Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov and Chinese President Xi Jinping initiated programs that included education, healthcare, and TCM. In 2014, a delegation from the University of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Chengdu visited Republic of North Macedonia, emphasizing the integration of TCM into the Macedonian healthcare system through educational programs and staff training. These foundational agreements highlight the importance of incorporating TCM into national healthcare policy.

The Role of Tong Da Tang TCM Skopje

As a professional association aligned with the Law on Complementary and Alternative Medicine, Tong Da Tang TCM Skopje plays a pivotal role in the regulation and professional development of CAM practitioners. The law, particularly Article 91, paragraph 2, empowers professional associations like Tong Da Tang to set educational standards, organize training programs, and propose measures to improve CAM practices.

Tong Da Tang TCM Skopje has actively promoted TCM through symposiums, congresses, and international collaborations, including hosting Chinese delegations that emphasized the need for regulatory structures. In the most recent delegation visit in July 2024, a consensus was reached on establishing a Chamber of CAM Practitioners to oversee the certification, ethical conduct, and professional development of practitioners, ensuring patient safety and the integrity of CAM treatments.

The Role of a CAM Chamber

The establishment of a Chamber for CAM Practitioners is critical for ensuring the safe, professional, and effective delivery of alternative medicine practices in Republic of North Macedonia. This body would be responsible for certifying CAM practitioners, setting educational and professional standards, and ensuring adherence to ethical codes. Without such a regulatory body, there is a risk of unqualified individuals providing ineffective or harmful treatments in disciplines like TCM, acupuncture, homeopathy, chiropractic care, and bioinformatics.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has published Guidelines on Basic Training and Safety in Acupuncture, which emphasize the importance of regulating CAM disciplines to ensure patient safety. A CAM chamber in Republic of North Macedonia would implement these guidelines, ensuring that practitioners meet international standards of safety and training. The chamber would also foster public trust in CAM, which is crucial for the widespread acceptance and integration of these therapies into the healthcare system.

Benefits of Full Implementation and Regulation

The establishment of a CAM chamber offers multiple benefits for both practitioners and patients in Republic of North Macedonia:

- **Patient Safety:** A chamber would ensure that only qualified practitioners are certified to provide CAM services, reducing the risk of malpractice and promoting safe treatments.
- **Professional Development:** The chamber would oversee continuous professional development, requiring CAM practitioners to stay updated on the latest developments in their fields, thereby improving the overall quality of care.
- **Integration with Healthcare:** Recognizing and regulating CAM practices would allow for a more holistic approach to patient care, combining conventional medicine with alternative therapies for more comprehensive treatment plans.
- **Research and Development:** The chamber would promote collaboration between CAM practitioners and conventional healthcare providers, fostering research into innovative treatment approaches that integrate the best of both fields.

Furthermore, a CAM chamber would position Republic of North Macedonia as a regional hub for high-quality CAM practices, ensuring that local practitioners meet international standards while fostering global cooperation in alternative medicine.

Conclusion

The regulation of CAM in Republic of North Macedonia is an urgent necessity. With a well-established legal framework and international collaborations, particularly with China regarding TCM, the Ministry of Health must act decisively. Establishing a Chamber for CAM Practitioners is the key to ensuring safe, professional, and effective CAM practices, benefiting both practitioners and patients alike. Tong Da Tang TCM Skopje strongly urges the Ministry to fully implement the law and establish the chamber, which was due nearly a decade ago. This move would enhance public trust in CAM, ensuring that Republic of North Macedonia remains a leader in the region for regulated, safe, and effective alternative medicine practices.

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