More research in TCM needed

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my paper
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Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) has established a strong presence among the Chinese community, and is growing in standing as an alternative or complementary treatment among the non-Chinese community as well, Minister of State for Health Amy Khor said yesterday.

However, she noted that Singapore's research on TCM lags behind that in countries with a shorter history of TCM exposure.

Citing as examples scientific institutions in the United States and Australia, which are conducting TCM-related studies, she urged the TCM community to "look into niche areas of research which can reflect our unique multicultural background and local health-care settings".

She said more research should be done to raise awareness and elevate the standing of the industry.

"Although TCM and Western medicine are etched in different philosophies, research findings can provide a common language for the public to understand which TCM therapies have been proven safe and effective," she said.

Research findings will also empower consumers to make informed choices when choosing medical treatment, she added.

Under the TCM Practitioners Act passed in 2000, practitioners must have a licence and be registered with the Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners Board, a statutory board under the Ministry of Health, which regulates the industry.

Hospitals such as the National University Hospital and Singapore General Hospital have set up in-house acupuncture services for pain management.

Dr Khor was speaking at the Furthering TCM In Singapore Symposium at the School of Biological Sciences in Nanyang Technological University (NTU). Some 120 people from the TCM industry, as well as allied health professionals from hospitals, attended it.

Dr Khor also lauded TCM organisations, like the Singapore College of TCM and TCM maker Eu Yan Sang, for providing Continuing Education and Training for TCM practitioners.

"As TCM develops, it is necessary that its role be tailored to the needs of the current generation of Singaporeans... The public expect (the industry's) skills and knowledge to be up to date," she said.
Ms Karen Wee, chairman of the NTU Chinese Medicine Alumni Association, agreed that Singapore's TCM industry lags behind that of countries such as China and Australia.

The lag, she suggested, may be partly because TCM practitioners here traditionally focus on practice rather than research.

"There are a lot more things we should do to push the advancement of TCM in the right way," she said.

However, as the association is still young - it was launched only in August last year - it is focusing more on reuniting graduates from NTU's double-degree programme in biomedical sciences and Chinese medicine, and equipping them with industry knowledge, she said.

"Research will be a big part of our plans, but it will be in the long run," she said, adding that the association will work on it in four to five years.

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