More local research needed in TCM

By Sara Grosse | Posted: 11 March 2012 2008 hrs

SINGAPORE: Health industry players said more local research is needed in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM).

Minister of State for Health Amy Khor said Singapore's research currently lags behind countries with a shorter history of TCM.

She was speaking at a symposium on TCM at Nanyang Technological University (NTU).

With an ageing population, there has been an increased focus from the health care industry on the rise of chronic diseases.

Those in the TCM industry said its medicine and methods can provide an alternative treatment.

But Singapore's research in the sector lags behind other countries.

Dr Amy Khor said: "Several scientific institutions across the US are conducting TCM related studies on acupuncture, arthritis, asthma and abuse of alcohol and drugs with the support of the National Centre for Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

"In Australia, a number of clinical trials of acupuncture on allergic rhinitis, pain and women’s health have been carried out.

"In order to raise awareness and elevate the standing of TCM, we should be open to conducting more research on TCM treatment."

Practitioners said one reason could be Singapore's high standard of western medicine practice.

So to further develop TCM, its strengths should be identified in areas where it can play a complementary role to western medicine.

Nanyang Technological University’s (NTU) Professorial Fellow Professor Hong Hai, who is a registered TCM Physician, said: "There’s quite a lot of research being done on using herbs for specific conditions, specific diseases. But not enough has been done I think on using TCM treatments for conditions as diagnosed by TCM.

"In TCM we don’t necessarily refer to conditions as disease but as some kind of imbalance, what we call a syndrome. I think more work has to be done on how TCM methods can be used to treat syndromes."

Professor Hong added that more funding for research is needed.

And more TCM graduates can help enhance the sector further.

NTU currently has a double degree programme in Biomedical Sciences and Chinese Medicine launched in 2005.

NTU Chinese Medicine Alumni Association President, Karen Wee said: "Besides clinical, they can contribute to research, management. For example, they are going into management of TCM industry companies. Or even teaching, educating. It’s also some avenues that we can actually contribute to the development of the TCM industry. So I believe in the years to come, the employment status or the prospects for the TCM will slowly get better and bigger if we open up these avenues for them."

60 per cent of NTU’s first batch of graduates in the double degree programme now work in TCM-related fields. 20 per cent are in biomedical and teaching while the other 20 per cent are furthering their studies.

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