



Thai Traditional Medicine Kingdom of Thailand

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23.1 Introduction

The Kingdom of Thailand has her own system of traditional medicine called “Thai traditional medicine” (TTM), which was originated during Sukhothai period (1238-1377) and progressively developed as a means of national healthcare until the early 20th century when modern medicine started to replace TTM as the mainstream healthcare system. The revival of TTM and the promotion of the use of herbal medicines and medicinal plants for the primary health care began again in 1978. Later on the “Thai Traditional Medicine and Pharmacy Coordinating Center” was established in 1989 under the Office of the Permanent Secretary of Public Health as a coordinating organization to develop TTM. The center later became the “Institute of Thai Traditional Medicine” (ITTM) under the Department of Medical Services in 1993 (1).

As a result of Bureaucratic Reform Act 2002, the Department for Development of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine (DTAM) was established as a new department under the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) in October 2002 (2). ITTM was then moved to be an institute under DTAM and the Division of Alternative Medicine was also set up under DTAM (3). The establishment of DTAM showed the commitment of the government to promote TTM and complementary and alternative (CAM) as another means of health care and promotion for Thai people.



revival of TTM into the country's health care system again. The school has just been moved under the administration of the Faculty of Medicine, Siriraj Hospital, Mahidol University and the curriculum will be adjusted to a Bachelor's degree level with more clinical practice training.

- **Rajamangkala Institute of Technology Pathumthani Campus.** This institute has offered three-year curriculum in TTM since 1999 and the curriculum will be improved to a Bachelor's degree level in the future.

3. The system that teaches “**TTM at a Bachelor's degree level**”. An increased interest in TTM and CAM of Thai people prompted many universities and academic institutions to offer Bachelor's degree education in TTM. In addition to the study of TTM, the curricula also cover basic life sciences and social sciences. The first two universities shown below have already started teaching the course, while the rest will open their Bachelor's degree program soon.

- **Maharakham University**, Faculty of Pharmacy in Maharakham province in the northeast of Thailand
- **Rangsit University**, Faculty of Oriental Medicine, a private university that teaches many life science courses along with TTM, oriental medicine and Ayurvedic medicine, as well as the science of herbal drug development and quality control.
- **Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University**, the first open university that offers the Bachelor's degree course in TTM starting from June 2004.
- **Mahidol University**, Faculty of Medicine at Siriraj Hospital
- **Thammasat University**, Faculty of Medicine
- **Ramkhamhaeng University**

In summary, regardless of the system a person chooses to receive an education in TTM, he or she must take examinations given by the Division of Medical Registration in order to become a licensed practitioner. Currently, there are four types of licensed practitioners and, as of the year 2003, the cumulative numbers of these practitioners were as follows (7):

- Thai traditional medicine practitioners — 14,912
- Thai traditional pharmacy practitioners — 18,997
- Thai Traditional midwifery practitioners — 2,869
- Applied Thai traditional medicine practitioners — 379

Training and education in Thai traditional massage

Thai traditional massage is a branch TTM using manual therapy to treat several diseases and symptoms and for relaxation. Thai massage is now becoming popular and well known worldwide and various institutes offer training courses in Thai traditional massage. Therefore, DTAM together with the Department of Labour have developed three levels of national occupational skill standards of Thai traditional



massage based on the curricula of MOPH in an attempt to standardize the skill of Thai traditional masseurs and masseuses for consumer protection, namely: -

Level 1 is equivalent to having >150 hours but <330 hours of training by MOPH curriculum on Thai traditional massage for health.

Level 2 is equivalent to having >330 hours but <800 hours of MOPH curriculum on Thai traditional massage (372 hours).

Level 3 is equivalent to having >800 hours of training by MOPH curriculum on Thai traditional massage (800 hours).

The second and the third levels are “Thai therapeutic massage” levels, masseurs/masseuses with such skill standards will be able to treat about 10 and 35 diseases and symptoms, respectively. Skill tests are given periodically by the Ministry of Labour in collaboration with DTAM. Moreover, The Division of Medical Registration is now working on a plan to license traditional masseurs and masseuses for consumer protection purpose in the future.

Regarding the control of CAM practice, the Division of Medical Registration also issues licence to CAM practitioners in the field of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). As of the year 2002, the number of licensed TCM practitioners was 117 (7). Training courses in acupuncture for allopathic physicians have been regularly organized by Thai-Chinese Medical Co-operation Center, presently under DTAM, for a number of years.

23.5. Financing

DTAM received a fiscal budget of 95 and 112 million bahts (1 US\$ is about 40 bahts) for the fiscal years 2003 and 2004, which were 0.22% and 0.25% of the fiscal budget of MOPH, respectively. In addition, ITTM also receives some financial support for some of its activities from Thai Traditional Medicine Development Foundation, a non-profit organization established in November 1996 to support the development of TTM.

Regarding the national health insurance system, the types of TTM services in the public healthcare facilities covered by the Universal Coverage Program are traditional herbal medicine, massage, herbal steam bath and hot herbal compress meant for the treatment and rehabilitation purposes, not for health promotion purpose.

23.6. Research and information

According to the policies of the National Research Council of Thailand and MOPH, researches on the body of knowledge of TTM, CAM and R&D of new herbal drugs from medicinal plants are regarded as another important areas of health research of



the country. Collaborative research projects that pool experienced researchers and resources from various research institutes and are product-oriented and complete-cycled in nature are given high priority for funding.

Several research and academic institutes in Thailand have been active in researches on medicinal plants to develop into the easy-to-use modern dosage forms and to establish the efficacy, safety and quality of the herbal products. Those research institutes are, e.g. DTAM, Department of Medical Sciences, Government Pharmaceutical Organization, Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research, and Schools of Pharmacy and Medicine of most universities. In addition, DTAM and universities also conduct researches on the bodies of knowledge of TTM and CAM.

Over the years, ITTM has disseminated the information on TTM in various forms, e.g. seminars, books, VCDs, videos, posters, pamphlets, Web page, etc. The knowledge is distributed to the public via all levels of hospitals and health service centers all over the country, and through different forms of media, e.g. radio, TV, newspapers, printed materials, and the Internet. In addition, the institute also presents TTM wisdom to the public in the form of exhibition on various occasions locally and abroad.

23.7 Discussions

Regardless of the national policy on the incorporation of TTM and CAM into the national healthcare system, certain laws and regulations still hinder the integration process. For example, the 2002 Ministerial Regulation stated that the practice of a TTM or applied TTM practitioner in a public healthcare facility must be under the supervision of a physician. This has become an obstacle to the provision of TTM services to the grassroots people since Thailand does not have enough doctors to work at the health center level. Hence, currently there has been a movement for the amendment of this regulation.

Though several attempts have been made to promote the use of TTM for health care, traditional medicines are still not widely used by the public as the values of locally produced and imported traditional medicines during the years 1993-1999 were only 1.2-2.5% of those of modern medicines (8). In order to gain greater acceptance by other health professions and the public, more pre-clinical and clinical researches must be conducted to obtain evidence-based knowledge to support safe and effective therapeutic practices and to develop quality TTM and CAM products.



23.8 Conclusion

For successful integration of TTM and CAM into the national healthcare system in the future, DTAM therefore places great emphasis on research to prove therapeutic efficacy and safety of the products and therapies, development of certified educational system and training curricula and collaboration with other public and private sectors involved both locally and abroad.

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