

Status and Prospect on Contemporary Natural Medicine

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1. Concept of Natural Medicine

Natural Medicine has evolved along with human social evolution. It started by using primitive natural methods, natural medication and traditional health preservation methods, for disease diagnosis and treatment, rehabilitation, disease prevention, and health maintenance. Now, Natural Medicine has become an encompassing discipline of the medical field. However, the basic concept of Natural Medicine remains “human and nature in unison,” “mind and body in unison,” that is, the harmonious whole-body concept.

2. Definition of Natural Medicine

The definition of Natural Medicine consists of two parts. First, it exists in nature in a variety of substances and forms such as light, sound, water, electricity, air, soil, flowers and fruits, magnets, cold, heat, etc., that can be used directly or indirectly for human disease prevention and cure. Second, Natural Medicine is based on the yin any yang theory, and the concept of whole-body balancing. It studies human body characteristics, and the organic nature of the diseases, both under natural laws. A variety of natural methods are then applied to restore human’s natural capabilities, and to mobilize the body’s life potentials, for achieving a balance between yin and yang. It takes full advantage of what natural environment provides, to stimulate the body to resist and cure diseases, and be rehabilitated.

3. The Practice Side of Natural Medicine Is Natural Therapy

The practice side of Natural Medicine is Natural Therpay. There is a diverse range of natural therapies that operate under the principle of Natural Medicine for preventing and curing diseases. Its characteristics are significantly different from surgery, synthetic chemical drugs, and radiotherapy, etc. In principle, this is a non-invasive and non-toxic therapy with virtually little trauma and pain.

4. Natural Therapies and Human Body’s Self Knowledge

Natural therapies have a wide scope of applications in the treatment of various diseases. They are generally simple, safe, effective, economical and practical, with little or no toxic side effects. Commonly-used natural therapies are such as acupuncture, scraping of the skin, massage, qigong, music, sound, water and light therapies. Natural therapies use the discipline and power of nature to regulate the body's imbalances and to restore the body's natural abilities. It's just common sense that we should avoid any treatment which can weaken the body's self-healing ability. Therefore, natural therapies do not rely on chemical drugs or surgeries, in order to avoid toxin accumulation, and body trauma.

The human being is a biological creature; the body has a fixed acid-alkaline balance that requires a discipline of essential nutrients, and metabolism. When the whole body is in a balanced state, it can perform its own functions including detoxification, immune defense and growth. But once the external factors negatively affect the metabolic balance and regulation of the body, it will result in

diseases If Natural Medicine professionals are able to grasp the disciplines of the human body, and utilize natural therapies in reasonable ways, they can re-balance the body back to normal. Going back to the basic concept of Natural Medicine we are reminded of "human and nature in unison," and "mind and body in unison."

5. Where Did Natural Medicine Come from?

The term "Natural Medicine" appeared as early as 4000 B.C. in some ancient Indian medical literature. However, China is one of the birthplaces of Natural Medicine. It has the most comprehensive record of theoretical systems of natural therapies, and clinical treatments.

Theories of natural therapy originated in about 700 BC during the "Spring/ Autumn/Warring-Factions" period of China. It was then the initial Chinese Medical System was formed, the historical records of which include mineral spa bath, breathing exercise, "five-animal movement exercises;" tai chi, qigong therapy, and other natural therapies that are still being practiced by Asians and others today.

Natural therapies in the West originated in the 18th century called Western Alternative medicine. In 1991, the United States, Japan, Singapore and other countries formally proposed a theory of natural medicine or natural therapy. In its quoted view, "the human body in theory is in a wonderful balance, and it has self-healing capabilities. In the medical process, we should avoid any treatments which can weaken the body's self-healing ability. In addition, we cannot ignore the body's healing ability, and we cannot replace various self-healing ability of the body by various medical treatments." There we have it, the basic concept of Natural Medicine.

6. Problems Facing Natural Medicine

Due to historical, cultural and environmental differences, there are numerous theories of modern Natural Medicine. Hot springs, plants, diet, sleep, music, biofeedback, qigong, shiatsu, massage, exercise, acupuncture, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and other therapies are prevalent among many more others. Every therapy or method has its theoretical basis and followings. It is a fact that, despite Natural Medicine having a long history and documented contributions to human health, it has not been generally accepted by most patients and medical professionals. This problem is not only due to external forces, but also due to deficiencies in the field of Natural Medicine. Let me cite seven examples:

6.1 First, the lack of a complete scientific and theoretical basis in traditional Natural Medicine, non-standardized terms, and lack of innovation, all limit the development of Natural Medicine.

6.2 Second, Natural Medicine is generally classified as an experience-based medicine because its philosophies are totally different from chemical-based modern medicine. Natural Medicine is not recognized by the modern medical profession due to lack of modern medical evidences.

6.3 Third, Natural Medicine professionals are scattered all over the world. There is very little communication between them. They are fragmented, not within a unified system. The theories are difficult to promote, thus easy to be ignored.

6.4 Fourth, Natural Medicine training is seriously lagging. The little there is, very isolated and inward looking, results in virtually having no successors to champion it.

6.5 Fifth, in applying Natural Medicine, doctors and therapists lack scientific and standardized training and mentoring. Also they lack safe and formal processes, resulting in misunderstandings by other professionals, undermining the efficacy and reputation of Natural Medicine.

6.6 Sixth, natural medicine and pseudo-medicine boundaries are unclear since the beginning of ancient healing methods. Sometimes, practitioners deceive patients with over-the-top or mythical effectiveness of their therapies. The public has difficulty distinguishing them from the genuine, because these methods are often similar to natural therapies. Thus some people distrust even the true natural therapies wholesale, seriously affecting the reputation and development of Natural Medicine.

6.7 Seventh, the public do not have a deep understanding of Natural Medicine in the absence of promotion and education.

7. Short-Term Tactics for Dealing with the Problems and Challenges

Although Natural Medicine faces suspicion, exclusion and difficulties in promotion, Natural Medicine experts (*many of whom are present in this conference*) have the responsibility and obligation to improve the applications of natural therapies, and to cherish this common treasure of humanity, for the simple goal of improving human health. Our short-term objectives are, in short, to collect, sort, and promote each nation's natural methods of medical diagnosis and treatments. To that end, we must make unremitting efforts to do the following five tasks:

7.1. Carry out Frequent and Extensive Academic Exchanges

First, Specialty Committee of Natural Therapy (SCNT) is building a platform to expand its Natural Therapy organization and its general memberships. It will regularly carry out academic exchange activities, and promote natural therapy research exchange and cooperation throughout the world. It also aims to strengthen the theory of Natural Medicine in order to better inherit the essence of Natural Medicine.

7.2. Establish a Comprehensive Information Base on Natural Medicine

Second, establish a comprehensive information base on Natural Medicine. It is the crucial key to promoting the normalization and standardization of development and promotion of Natural Medicine. Through the standardized framework of Natural Medicine, the natural therapy research committee can expect healthy developments throughout the world. We hope that Natural Medicine experts worldwide can work together to collect and organize the scattered information on traditional natural therapies, and to discover and improve those with incomplete theoretical basis. And, we can make it more scientific, systematic, regulated and standardized for better promotion and acceptance. The discussion papers on the concept and contents of Natural Medicine and natural therapies in this conference are good attempts in this direction.

7.3. Set Standards for Evaluating the Effects of Natural Therapies

Third, despite natural therapies having broad applications and being effective, their evaluation criteria, adaptabilities and precautions are lacking, and need to be determined. In order to achieve better medical efficacies, we often need to use a variety of natural therapies in conjunction with each other. In light of this, we need to coordinate among a variety of natural therapies to define integrative applications. In order to better assess the efficacy of natural therapies, singly and/or integrative, we must develop evidence-based standards, recognizing both experiences and evidences. When we use evidence-based medicine to verify the efficacy of natural therapies, we can attain greater credibility and more rapid development opportunities.

7.4. Promote Natural Medicine

Fourth, promote Natural Medicine. The activities include:

- Promoting the features and advantages of Natural Medicine, and demonstrating its impacts.

- Studying each country's current development status of Natural Medicine, and absorbing the latest and matured research results.
- Promoting cooperation in scientific research of natural therapies, and proclaiming the achievements.
- Using modern scientific methods for data collecting, processing and analysis of the efficacy and side effects of natural therapies.

In so doing, Natural Medicine can finally be perceived as "simple," "flexible," "non-toxic," "effective;" and "inexpensive;" etc. This will strengthen people's awareness of Natural Medicine, promoting it to all sectors of society. And with education, establish confidence in using Natural Medicine for disease prevention and control.

7.5. Establish Eligibility Criteria and Rating System for Natural Medicine Physicians

Fifth, we need to draft a list of eligibility criteria and a rating system to qualify natural medicine physicians. It is only through standardization that we can have an orderly development and promotion of natural therapists worldwide. We need to establish a qualification assessment agency for natural medicine physicians, establish an accreditation and rating standards committee, and train international personnel, so that Natural Medicine experts and researchers world-wide can develop to their potential.

8. Long-Term Prospects of Natural Medicine

Let us now see what long-term prospects Natural Medicine will have. Natural Medicine will cross over preventive medicine, clinical medicine, rehabilitation medicine, nutrition, psychology, physics and other health care systems. We will have done major research on Natural Medicine, the results of which will allow us to better inherit, discover, sort, improve, innovate, interpret and share the theories and practices of Natural Medicine. In the future, we will develop and refine together to make Natural Medicine a medical system that has its own unique features. Although it originated from traditional medicine, it will have absorbed modern medical technologies, making it safe and effective. And, sometime, hopefully in my lifetime, the Western medical professionals will incorporate Natural Medicine with their medical profession and practice them both side by side.

9. Summary

Let me preface my summary by saying that in today's go-go-go non-stop world, the spectrum of diseases has seen a fundamental change. Cancers, cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, diabetes and other chronic diseases of the liver and kidney, are now at the top of the spectrum. They can hardly be cured singly by using modern Western Medicine, which usually cures the symptoms but not the root causes. Chemical and drug-induced diseases are rampant. They have become topic-of-the-day in the medical world. So, people have a pressing desire to find a new medical method that does not rely on chemical drugs, which is safe and virtually without side effects, which can strengthen the body's immune system to fight diseases, and at the same time achieve the aim of disease prevention and cure.

The desire has led to the recent phenomenon of "return to nature" and "return to basics" slogans of some nature-oriented people, which is good for Natural Medicine. At the same time, a number of safe and effective natural therapies are receiving greater and greater attention and recognition. Experts and scholars from all over the world continuously experiment with natural therapies to prevent and cure diseases. And, medial experts are endeavoring to find breakthroughs to solve all kinds of medical problems. In light of all these, I think the scientific and systematic study, exploration, organization, promotion and popularization of Natural Medicine is imperative. This is the heavy responsibility entrusted to us, and it has an important and far-reaching significance.