
FACT SHEET

The Regulation of the Operation of Chinese Medicine Outpatient Clinics in Singapore and Taiwan

1. Introduction

1.1 There are three Chinese medicine (CM) outpatient clinics established by the Government. Each of the CM outpatient clinics is attached to a separate Hospital Authority (HA) hospital, namely Tung Wah Hospital, Yan Chai Hospital and Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital.

1.2 This fact sheet provides the Panel on Health Services of the Legislative Council with some basic information regarding the regulation of the operation of CM outpatient clinics in Singapore and Taiwan.

2. Singapore

2.1 According to the Ministry of Health (MOH) of the Singaporean government, there is no CM outpatient clinic operated by the Singaporean government nor run by the public sector. CM treatments in Singapore, including acupuncture, are provided by the private sector.¹ MOH also states that there is no plan to provide any public CM outpatient services nor any funding or subsidy for such services. Since western medicine is the main healthcare service in Singapore, CM plays a complementary role only².

¹ There are about 800 CM clinics in Singapore. Most of them are run by individual CM practitioners of a small scale, while a few larger ones are run by voluntary welfare organizations.

² MOH estimates that about 45% of the population consult a CM practitioner, and about 12% of daily outpatient attendance are treated by CM practitioners.

2.2 The Singaporean government does not regulate the operation of CM clinics, and there is no provision of relevant laws/regulations/guidelines/codes of practice. Instead, the Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners Board³ (Board) is responsible for regulating the conduct and practice of registered CM practitioners, including CM physicians and acupuncturists⁴, regardless of their place of practice.

2.3 According to MOH, CM dispensers are also not regulated by statute. However, MOH considers that CM clinics should regularly conduct refresher training courses for their dispensers to ensure that they recognize various types of Chinese herbs and their respective therapeutic effects.⁵

3. Taiwan⁶

3.1 CM treatments are widely practised in Taiwan. As at December 2001, there were 44 CM hospitals, 2 544 CM clinics and 3 979 licensed CM doctors. Some of these CM hospitals and CM clinics are operated by the government. However, their total figures are not available.

3.2 The operation of CM clinics in Taiwan is regulated by the government. In line with the practice of other clinics⁷, CM clinics are required to apply to the Department of Health (DOH) for an operation licence. The requirements for obtaining an operation licence are set out in the Standards of the Facilities of Medical Treatment Establishments (Standards)⁸, which is a statutory document. Once a CM clinic has obtained its operation licence, it is subject to periodic inspections by DOH personnel. Such routine checks help maintain the establishment standards of CM clinics.

³ The Board was established upon the enactment of the Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners Act (Act) in November 2000. Article 3(2) of the Act stipulates the composition of the Board, which consists of not less than five and not more than nine members appointed by the Minister of Health. Four members of the Board should meet the following requirements: (a) one should be a registered CM practitioner; (b) one should be a government official; and (c) two should be registered persons with at least 10 years of experience in the field of CM.

⁴ As at the end of 2001, 1 448 acupuncturists were registered with the Board. However, the total number of registered CM physicians was not available.

⁵ Information regarding the frequency of refresher training courses conducted by CM clinics is not available.

⁶ The Research and Library Services Division (RLSD) sent enquiries to the responsible ministry and government department in Taiwan to obtain the required information. However, as at the publication of this fact sheet, neither the ministry nor the government department has responded to the request.

⁷ Other clinics are general clinics, specialist clinics and dental clinics.

⁸ The Standards, which were enacted in May 1996, are instituted to promote the sound development of the medical treatment and to enhance the quality of medical treatment.

3.3 Schedule VI of the Standards, entitled Standards of the Facilities of Clinics, provides for the regulation of various types of clinics in Taiwan. In regard to the general CM clinics, the requirements for medical personnel and clinical facilities are listed below:

Medical personnel

- (a) CM doctors⁹ and nursing personnel¹⁰ who work in a CM clinic should be licensed with DOH;¹¹ and
- (b) A CM clinic should have at least one staff for keeping patients' records.

Facilities¹²

- (c) A CM clinic should be equipped with at least one reception room, one consultation room, and a separate CM dispensing area; and
- (d) A CM clinic should not have more than nine treatment beds.

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⁹ Under the Physician's Law, an individual who has passed the examination for doctor of CM and holding a doctor of CM licence may practise as a Chinese medical doctor.

¹⁰ Under the Nursing Personnel Law, an individual who has passed the nursing personnel examination and holding a nursing personnel certificate may serve as a nursing personnel.

¹¹ RLSD has not been able to ascertain whether there are any statutory requirements for the practice of acupuncturists and CM dispensers.

¹² There are two additional facility requirements for specialist CM clinics, i.e. an examining room and X-ray equipment.

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