FEATURE ARTICLE

Current Status and Future Prospects of Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine in Canada

Ben Bao Qi Cao (曹宝琪)

ABSTRACT  Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and acupuncture has been gradually accepted by the mainstream society since the 1970s and has been rapidly expanding, accompanying the tide of Chinese immigration since the 1980s. Acupuncture legislation has been approved by the governments of 5 provinces in Canada between 1988 and 2014. After the acceptance of self-regulation, 5 corresponding colleges were established, one after another. The code of ethics and professional practice standard were developed by the Colleges. British Columbia (BC) became the first Canadian province to offer acupuncture treatments as a supplementary benefit for its Medical Services Plan premium assistance recipients beginning in 2008. The 5 colleges united to form the Canadian Alliance of Regulatory Bodies of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists (CARB-TCMPA) in the same year. The Entry-level Occupational Competencies for the Practice of TCM in Canada were developed by CARB-TCMPA in 2010. The Pan-Canadian registration examinations for acupuncturists, herbalists and TCM practitioners have been administered and scheduled since 2013. The Entry-level Occupational Competencies for Doctors of TCM were developed by College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of British Columbia (CTCMA-BC) in 2014. It sketches the blueprint for future development of the TCM profession in Canada.

KEYWORDS  traditional Chinese medicine, acupuncture, legislation, regulation

Preface

The uses of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and acupuncture in Canada can be traced back to the 1880s accompanying Chinese labour immigration for the gold rush and the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in British Columbia (BC). However, it was limited within the Chinese community at that time. It has been gradually accepted by the mainstream society since the 1970's due to announcement of acupuncture anesthesia study. It rapidly expanded accompanying the tide of Chinese immigration since the 1980s.

The Chinese Medicine and Acupuncture Association of Canada (CMAAC) was established in 1983. Acupuncture is one of the leaders in complementary medical service in Canada. Acupuncture rounded out the five most common therapies used by Canadians over their lifetime, with 17% Canadians having used acupuncture (a statistically significant increase of 5% from 1997 to 2006).

The pioneer practitioners of TCM and acupuncture called on the provincial governments for legislation to regulate TCM and acupuncture practice. This article will briefly introduce the legislation and regulation of TCM and acupuncture in Canada.

Legislation

Legislation is one of the most important instruments of government for organising society and protecting its citizens. The importance and necessity of legislation of TCM and acupuncture practice is the only way that the TCM profession can be recognized a legal health profession; that the right and interests of the public and TCM practitioners can be protected; that unqualified persons be identified and prohibited from practice; and that the TCM profession can appropriately develop. TCM is an entirely different medical system from Western medicine.

©The Chinese Journal of Integrated Traditional and Western Medicine Press and Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg 2014
Hygieia Clinic, College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of British Columbia, Examination Committee of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of British Columbia and Examination Committee of Canadian Alliance of Regulatory Bodies of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists, Vancouver, Canada
Tel: 1-604-688-6578, E-mail: bbbq55@hotmail.com
DOI: 10.1007/s11655-014-1962-8
Canada is a federation composed of 10 provinces and 3 territories. The main role of Health Canada (a federal department) is to set and administer national principles as well as to regulate food, health and consumer products in order to help Canadians maintain and improve their health.\(^{(4)}\) While the provinces and territories are responsible for delivering healthcare to the majority of Canadians, authority of legislation for TCM and acupuncture like all of other health profession is under the jurisdiction of the provincial and territorial governments. Provincial acupuncture legislation was established in the following order: Alberta (1988),\(^{(5)}\) Quebec (1994),\(^{(6)}\) BC (1996),\(^{(7)}\) Ontario (2006),\(^{(8)}\) Newfoundland and Labrador (2010).\(^{(9)}\) Similarly, TCM legislation was established in BC (1999) and Ontario (2006).

It is worthwhile to mention that TCM is a philosophical tradition from which acupuncture, herbology, and other primary TCM therapies derive their theoretical base and standard of practice. Actually, the BC government established the College of Acupuncturists of British Columbia (CABC) in 1996. Subsequently, through the extensive efforts of visionary pioneers who requested government regulation of TCM and acupuncture, a public hearing was held by the Health Professions Council in 1997 regarding the designation of TCM. After careful study of the submissions and the testimony at the public hearing, the Council believed that it is more appropriate that one college govern both the practitioners of TCM and acupuncture. CABC was expanded to the College and Association of Acupuncturists in Alberta (CAAA) since 2011, the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of Ontario (TCMPAO) and the College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists of Newfoundland and Labrador (CTCMPANL) since 2012. TCM practice has been regulated effectively by CTCMA-BC since 1999 and the TCMPAO since 2012.

The Health Professions Act (HPA) authorizes the provincial government of BC to designate a health profession by regulation. The Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists (TCMPA) Regulation designates TCM and acupuncture as a health profession and establishes the college to govern the profession. The TCMPA Regulation defines what is encompassed by "acupuncture" and "TCM" and sets outs the four reserved titles for registrants of the college: acupuncturist; TCM practitioner; TCM herbalist; doctor of TCM. The TCMPA Regulation sets out the scope of practice for an acupuncturist and a TCM practitioner and defines limits and conditions on the services that may be provided. Regulations generally deal with matters of broader public concern.

College

Mission and mandate of the college is to protect the safety of the public and to serve the interests of the public by regulating the acupuncture and TCM profession in the province.

Governance of the college is through a board or council. The majority of members of the board or the council are elected by the profession. Operations and management of the college of CTCMA-BC\(^{(7)}\) is through 9 committees (registration, examination, quality assurance, standards of education, executive, finance and administration, inquiry, discipline, and patient