

## **Herbalism in Hong Kong**

### **Government to Fund Herb Research and Register TCM Practitioners**

By Editorial Staff

Last year, the government of Hong Kong announced the creation of a 10-year program designed to give the country a more important role in the development of Chinese medicine worldwide.

As the latest step in that development program, the government has announced the allocation of nearly eight million dollars for research funding of two Chinese herbs, and has instituted a registration deadline for practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine.

"This research is important to the development of the Chinese medicine industry in Hong Kong, especially in the development of good agricultural practice, development of quality indices and drug formulation," said Francis Ho Suen-wai, Hong Kong's Commissioner for Innovation and Technology.

The first herbs to be studied are *dan shen* (*radix salviae miltiorrhizae*) and *san qi* (*radix notoginseng*). *Dan shen*, a perennial herb found in the rain forests of southeast Asia, is believed to be effective in treating cardiovascular conditions such as angina, while *san qi*, a greyish, cone-shaped root, has been shown to improve circulation and prevent inflammation and pain.

Three local institutions - Hong Kong Institute of Biotechnology, University of Science and Technology, and Baptist University - will use the funds to conduct research on quality control and assurance, with the hope of improving agricultural practice and production lines for herbal products within the next two years.

In a related move intended to help regulate the practice of TCM and improve the standard of care patients receive, the Department of Health has announced that all herbalists and practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine will have until December 30 to register with the Chinese Medicine Council. Those who do not register by the end of the year will lose their right to practice.

"We need to harmonize and normalize the situation left by history, and hence there is a need to introduce this arrangement," said Dr. Margaret Chan Fung Fu-chun, Hong Kong's Director of Health.

Practitioners with less than 10 years experience and no academic qualifications will have to pass a licensing exam before they can use the title "registered Chinese medicine practitioner." Those with more than 10 years experience or satisfactory academic qualifications will be exempt from the test, but they will still need to produce professional registration certificates, medical records or copies of prescriptions to register.

"We - that is, the government, the professional groups, the community representatives and the academics - collectively feel that this is the best basket of proposals which will help us to move traditional Chinese medicine forward," noted Dr. Fu-chun. Any complaints concerning the practice of Chinese medicine, she added, would be handled by the Department of Health.



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