Theories of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), a form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), has been practiced for over 2500 years, and approaches health as an interrelated and holistic state of being. Using multiple methods, the theories of TCM aim to balance:

- Qi
- Yin and Yang (Fig. 1)
- The Five Elements
- ZangFu Organs

BENEFITS and LIMITATIONS OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE [4]

Benefits

- Greater access to care due to fewer technological needs
- Holistic approach to health
- Prevention is an integral part to care
- Less invasive, fewer side effects
- Lower cost

Limitations

- Efficacy as compared to allopathic interventions
- Questions of safety
- Lack of evidence-base

TCM in CHINESE HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

- China is one of the few countries in which traditional medicine is given equal weight to allopathic medicine [1].
- There are two tracks of medical training in China: one for TCM, and one for allopathic medicine.
- Despite the general acceptance of TCM, about 75% of the country’s healthcare expenditure goes to hospital inpatient and outpatient care. [2]
- The common elements of TCM that are practiced include:
  - Herbal medicine
  - Acupuncture
  - Tuina massage
  - Moxibustion

BARRIERS TO USE OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINES in USA

- Lack of reimbursement by insurance companies
- Lack of certification by practitioners
- Lack of knowledge by the public and physicians about indications for CAM

Resources within the USA

- National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) [nccam.nih.gov]
- National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAO) [www.nccaom.org]

REFERENCES