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# Journal of Traditional and Complementary Medicine

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## Editorial

# Publishing scientifically sound papers in Traditional and Complementary Medicine



## A B S T R A C T

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Non-conventional medical practices that make use of dietary supplements, herbal extracts, physical manipulations, and other practices typically associated with folk and Traditional Medicine are increasingly becoming popular in Western Countries. These practices are commonly referred to by the generic, all-inclusive term “Complementary and Alternative Medicine.” Scientists, practitioners, and medical institutions bear the responsibility of testing and proving the effectiveness of these non-conventional medical practices in the interest of patients. In this context, the number of peer-reviewed journals and published articles on this topic has greatly increased in the recent decades. In this editorial article, we illustrate the policy of the Journal of Traditional and Complementary Medicine for publishing solid and scientifically sound papers in the field of Traditional and Complementary Medicine.

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## 1. Introduction

The term “Complementary and Alternative Medicine” (CAM; 補充與替代醫學 *bǔ chōng yǔ tì dài yī xué*) encompasses a variety of non-conventional medical and health practices that include the use of herbal remedies and dietary supplementation, Traditional Medicine, mind-body interventions, and acupuncture, among others. In some cases, these practices are used in place of conventional orthodox medicine, which justifies their connotation as “alternative,” though in most situations these practices are used together with conventional medical treatments, which justifies their connotation as “complementary.” Although these medical practices are known since ancient times, the use of these practices has greatly increased in recent decades, mainly due to the failure of orthodox medicine in the treatment of certain diseases. More and more patients turn to these medical practices because of their frustration and desperation regarding the limitations and side effects of conventional medicine. The term “integrative medicine” is used

when the “complementary” health treatments are offered along with conventional treatments. Yet, we can agree with Angell and Kassirer (*New England Journal of Medicine* 1998, 339: 839–841) that “*There cannot be two kinds of medicine – conventional and alternative. There is only medicine that has been adequately tested and medicine that has not, medicine that works and medicine that may or may not work.*” We must stress, however, that the so-called “alternative” medical practices are diverse in their foundations and methodologies. In this respect, mixing up all the non-conventional medical practices in one pot (as so-called “CAM”) and judging their validity collectively is wrong. There is an objective difference in the modality of how can work the acupuncture, herbal remedies, nutritional supplements, or body-mind interventions, and therefore different methods and standards for judging their effectiveness must be used. Still, we agree that there is no space for “magic” or “miracles” in medicine, and anecdotes and speculations cannot substitute for scientific evidence.

It is widely agreed that orthodox (conventional) therapies are based on scientific grounds, and in most cases have been tested for their safety and effectiveness in controlled clinical settings. On the contrary, the safety and effectiveness of CAM practices still constitute a major concern for their acceptance in the scientific community. Additional criticisms refer to the scarce reliability and lack of scientific grounds of the claimed therapeutic effects of CAM. Although we can argue against the absolute veracity of these criticisms, there are no doubts about the need for rigorous scientific testing of the validity of CAM in the interest of patients. In addition, we cannot neglect the possibility of adverse side effects of certain

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**Abbreviations:** AE, Associate Editor; CAM, complementary and alternative medicine; EBM, Editorial Board Member; IATCM, International Association for Traditional and Complementary Medicine; ICTCMH, International Conference of Traditional and Complementary Medicine on Health; OES, overall evaluation sheet; JTCM, Journal of Traditional and Complementary Medicine.

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CAM remedies, or of their negative synergism with current orthodox medical treatments. Therefore, a thorough investigation on the molecular and pathophysiological mechanisms of action of CAM treatments is mandatory.

To this end, we need the help of chemists, cell and molecular biologists, pathologists and physiologists, and clinicians. Large, controlled, and randomized clinical trials must prove the efficacy of CAM treatments. In addition, studies at cellular and molecular levels are needed to provide a solid scientific ground for their use, as are studies that confirm the quality, safety, and reliability of the treatment. Further, it is fundamental to share and integrate this knowledge in an open platform available to a wide audience of experts who can judge and criticize these studies.

The Journal of Traditional and Complementary Medicine (JTCM) is a peer-reviewed biomedical journal with this vocation. Among the various journals dedicated to CAM, JTCM stands for its unique goals by focusing on the relevance of Traditional and Complementary Medicine. In fact, the JTCM represents the ideal platform for studies on those auxiliary practices (including all traditional medical practices, dietary habits, integrative therapies with nutritional supplements and herbal extracts, and mental-physical activities) that can be of “complement” in preventive and curative medicine.

The JTCM was first launched, under the auspices of the Taiwanese Ministry of Health and Welfare, almost four years ago under the editorship of Lee-Yan Sheen, who very recently (November 2015) has appointed Ciro Isidoro as his close associate (see the timeline of the journal's development in [Appendix 1](#)). The main goal of the new team, which includes Chia-Chi Huang as Managing Editor and all members of the Editorial Board, is to shape the JTCM into a high-impact journal in the CAM and Biomedical Science categories. The mission of JTCM is to disseminate the knowledge on whether and how complementary and integrative health interventions can maintain and improve health and can contribute to health care. The JTCM pursues this aim through the publication of rigorous scientific studies that prove the usefulness and safety of such interventions. In order to most effectively pursue its mission, the JTCM will exploit its natural affinity and operational link with the International Association of Traditional and Complementary Medicine (IATCM). Readers and manuscript authors wishing to become members of the IATCM can do so through a simple registration at the <http://www.iatcm.org/> website. Following, we illustrate the policy of JTCM for publishing solid and scientifically sound papers in the field of Traditional and Complementary Medicine.

### 1.1. Our commitment to readers: the papers we wish to publish

We aim to provide the communities of scientists and practitioners with a global platform for discussion, perspectives, and research on Traditional and Complementary Medicine. To this end, we publish original articles in the following categories: 1. Full research articles and short communications, and 2. Reviews and mini-reviews. In addition, we accept letters and commentaries to the editor in which the readers can comment, discuss, and criticize the articles published and provide suggestions to improve the strategy and policy of the journal. Finally, we are open to publish the scientific report of international conferences on CAM-related topics (please contact our Managing Editor for your proposal).

The Journal covers Traditional Medicine, herbal medicine, folk medicine, preventive medicine, dietary therapy/nutrition supplements, and mind-body therapies, as well as reviews on historical, philosophical, and social-cultural aspects of traditional and folk medicine, other traditional and complementary therapies. The

JTCM encourages submissions on experimental investigations in translational and clinical studies, animal experiments, and *in vivo/in vitro* disease models. Further, the JTCM calls for articles that emphasize the pathophysiological basis and cellular-molecular mechanisms that underlie the beneficial effects of Traditional and Complementary Medicine. We wish to stress that the JTCM considers the Quality Control, the procedures for the preparation and characterization, and the authentication of herbal medicines and dietary supplements as basic requirements to guarantee efficacy, safety, and reproducibility in Traditional and Complementary Medicine.

### 1.2. Benefits for authors of JTCM

There are several reasons to choose the JTCM for the publication of your next work.

The [Online submission system](#) is user-friendly, and the [manuscript check-list](#) allows for rapid management of the manuscript. The reviewing process is convenient based on several aspects (see Section 1.4). We offer the Open Access Service to enhance the diffusion of the papers published, and we do not apply any publication fee for this service. To keep the scientific community informed on our latest publications, we will send a regular **e-alert of the Table of Contents** (an email with the list of the articles published in the journal) of the current JTCM issue to all IATCM members and registered readers (you can request the service through the function “[Subscribe to new volume alerts](#)” on Elsevier ScienceDirect).

The editors realize the importance of a timely publication, which keeps the readers updated with the latest discoveries and is useful for authors as they apply for academic promotion or for funding support. Therefore, the JTCM promotes the **e-Pub ahead-of-print** (also called “**Articles in Press**”) of the article within ten days of acceptance and after the authors have completed all the formalities required by the publisher (such as signing the copyright forms and proofreading). Finally, we offer the **Cover** of the current issue for the most significant (and beautiful) image of the published work.

### 1.3. Responsibility and benefits for reviewers of the JTCM

Reviewers are recruited by the Associate Editor (AE) and offer their assistance to assess the value of a manuscript on a voluntary basis. Reviewers remain anonymous to authors. The reviewer must have no *Conflict of Interest* with the author(s) and are required to adhere to ethical guidelines that mandate strict confidentiality about the content of the manuscript. The reviewers are responsible for assessing the manuscript, and must be rigorous in judging the originality and appropriateness of the methods. Further, reviewers are asked to provide the authors with constructive criticisms to help them to improve their work.

Reviewers who wish to submit their own work to the JTCM should mention in the cover letter the services they have provided for the Journal in order to benefit a fast-track reviewing process. We guarantee that papers submitted by our reviewers enter the peer review process. If you want to become a JTCM reviewer, please contact our Managing Editor (Dr Chia-Chi Huang) at [jtcm.me777@gmail.com](mailto:jtcm.me777@gmail.com). You may also join IATCM and express your willingness to be included in the database of potential reviewers.

### 1.4. The reviewing process: defining the OES

The Editor-in-Chief and Vice Editor-in-Chief (hereafter, the Editors) realize that reviewers and AEs devote much of their time to the assessment of a manuscript. Their objective evaluation of the

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