



Communication of professional literature amongst European Acupuncturists affiliated to the ETCMA (European Traditional Chinese Medicine Association)

Explorative survey amongst Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners in Europe

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Summary

Objectives: The primary aim of the survey was to explore the information needs and information seeking behavior amongst the ETCMA members concerning professional literature (scientific as well as practical background knowledge).

Methods: A web-based survey comprising of 18 questions with a total of 25 items was carried out in 15 affiliated associations in 14 countries in June 2012. The survey consisted out of 4 parts: (1) Demographics, (2) Level of interest in and availability of professional literature, (3) Insight, needs and opinions on EBM (Evidence Based Medicine), and (4) Awareness of the science workshop at the TCM Rothenburg Congress.

Abbreviations: ETCMA, European Traditional Chinese Medicine Association; TCM, Traditional Chinese Medicine; EBM, Evidence Based Medicine; WHO, World Health Organisation; T&CM, Traditional & Complementary Medicine; MD, Medical Doctor; AGTCM, Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Klassische Akupunktur und Traditionelle Chinesische Medizin; BAAC, British Acupuncture Council; DECIDE, Developing and evaluating communication strategies to support informed decisions and practice based on evidence.

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Results: 2590 (25%) from 10,428 members completed the questionnaire, of which 58.8% was female. More than 50% of the respondents from eleven out of fourteen countries indicate an interest in more education on reading scientific literature. Case studies (range 3.19/4–3.86/4) are preferred compared to scientific (range 2.78/4–3.59/4) or philosophical knowledge (range 3.0/4–3.56/4). Exchange with colleagues (range 2.95/4–3.64/4) is preferred compared to deepening knowledge (range 2.57/4–3.05/4) in the theoretical spectrum. 61% has no knowledge of the EBM model and base clinical decisions on personal experience (range 3.47–3.82) and practical skills (range 3.47–3.74) compared to clinical practice guidelines (range 2.6–3.27).

Conclusions: Due to heterogeneity in structure and size of the affiliated associations no strict conclusions can be made. We can conclude though that TCM practitioners rely mostly on practical knowledge and have less tendency toward more scientifically oriented models like the EBM model. We find this reflected in information needs as well as information seeking behavior patterns.

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Introduction

As an umbrella organization the ETCMA (European Traditional Chinese Medicine Association) represents fourteen^f affiliated TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) associations from twelve countries, with a combined membership of over ten thousand members (see Table 1). One of the main purposes of the ETCMA is to exchange experiences and views among practitioners and the organizations. Another is to foster improved standards within the field. In order to help improve standards within the field of TCM in Europe, the ETCMA has defined standards for minimal educational levels for members of the affiliated associations.¹ The organization is also attempting to help members become up to date in the issues such as scientific research and the evidence of acupuncture's effectiveness and mechanisms.

Member organizations communicate professional information^g to their members each in their own specific manner and debates in member association countries over the interpretation of the evidence about non-traditional medical systems and whether to incorporate and how to incorporate them.^{2,3} An important question in the nearby future will be to evaluate the necessity of the implementation of the Evidence based Model (EBM). Moreover, a recent survey performed amongst Korean medical doctors practicing traditional Korean medicine concluded that practitioners did not expect the advantage from evidence based medicine as is perceived in biomedicine.⁴ Demands arise for a centrally organized structure for research agenda.

Although the WHO reports progress in national research institutes for T&CM (Traditional & Complementary medicine) from 19 in 1999 to 73 in 2012,⁵ the range of implementation and research awareness are not well known. Educational levels amongst members differ from the professional to the doctoral degree and research interest and knowledge might differ to a certain extent.

To reach this goal of playing a central role in the provision of professional and scientific findings the science

committee of the ETCMA feels the necessity to find out the state of the art within the member associations about these issues. Therefore the information needs and information seeking behavior of members⁶ need to be explored. The science committee conducted a survey of all members of the ETCMA to explore this. This paper reports the findings of that survey.

The principle aims of the Survey:

1. The information needs amongst the ETCMA members concerning professional literature. The main question is the need for background knowledge distinguished in a theoretical (scientific and philosophical) and practical oriented dimension.
2. To gain insight in the information seeking behavior and find the best routes of communication with ETCMA members.

Secondary aims of the survey are to obtain basic statistics about the practice methods, background, education, etc. of this group of practitioners of acupuncture and Chinese medicine.

Table 1 Percentage of respondents from the member associations ETCMA.

Country (organization)	Members	No. of respondents (%)
Belgium (Eufom)	100	69 (69)
Czech Republic (CCTCM)	50	27 (54)
Denmark (PA)	400	189 (47)
Finland (FinnAcu)	125	53 (42)
France (FNMTC)	450	132 (29)
Germany (AGTCM)	1507	347 (23)
Israel (IATCM)	450	237 (53)
Ireland (IRCHM/AFPA)	307	93 (30)
Netherlands (NVA)	1000	367 (37)
Norway (AF/NNH)	1704 (820/884)	332 (20)
Poland (TAK)	17	6 (35)
Sweden (SATCM)	288	83 (29)
Switzerland (SBO-TCM)	1380	365 (26)
United Kingdom (BAC)	2650	290 (11)
Total	10,428	2590 (25)

^b To date the ETCMA counts over 20 affiliated member associations from 16 countries.

^c Professional literature or information is defined as the wide range of information concerning the profession of a TCM practitioner, covering the scientific, philosophical as well as the practical oriented dimension.

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