

## Acup-Moxi Around the World

# Development, Status and Opportunities of Acupuncture in Qatar\*

## 中医针灸在卡塔尔的发展现状与机遇\*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents an outline of the current status, regulations, and qualifications required for the practice of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and acupuncture in Qatar. The paper also provides an overview of the challenges and opportunities that face practitioners of Acupuncture as a complimentary medicine in Qatar and the recent licensing mechanisms introduced in January 2016. Qatar's 2030 vision and demand for continued development and sustainable growth includes the Chinese initiative 'One Belt, One Road' project which offers a golden opportunity for the further development of TCM in Qatar. The findings of this paper suggest that there are now real possibilities China and Qatar to cooperate in the exchange of medical services, training and education in the field of TCM.

**KEY WORDS:** acupuncture; traditional Chinese medicine; legislations; Qatar

Qatar is located in the southwest coast of the Persian Gulf, and is a peninsula country with stable politics and a unique culture, Qatar is also rich in natural gas resources. The economic development has changed considerably over the past 2 decades and Qatari Nationals enjoy a wealthy lifestyle. According to the population statistics issued by Ministry of Development Planning and Statistics (MDPS) of Qatar on February 29th, 2016, Qatar's permanent population is 2 545 600. The year-on-year growth is 5.1%. Foreign nationals account for approximately 85% of this figure and are mainly from India, Pakistan, Arab region, Europe and the United States. About 7000 people in Qatar are Chinese citizens employed by Chinese enterprise organizations and individual businesses, mainly living in the capital of Doha<sup>[1]</sup>.

### CURRENT STATUS OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE AND HEALTH CARE

National free health-care system is implemented in Qatar. There are eight hospitals (five specialist hospitals and three community hospitals) which operate under The Hamad Medical Corporation as well as the National Emergency Center and more than twenty medical and health care centers throughout various districts.

Most of these hospitals follow western medicine programs, however, the Arab traditional therapies such as bloodletting therapy, the traditional fire needle and herbs, have also been used based on folk wisdom.

Chinese cupping therapy is widely used in private clinics and massage parlors as a physical fitness and general well-being process. Some Chinese patent medicines are sold in drug stores as health food supplements.

In recent years, more and more people seek professional treatment of TCM, this is mainly due to the apparent curative effect, safety and the lack of adverse side effects. TCM and acupuncture have slowly gained acceptance and popularity from patients and is now widely accepted as a “complementary medicine” (CM), such as the Arabian traditional therapy<sup>[2]</sup>.

## ACUPUNCTURE REGULATIONS

Regulations on traditional and alternative complementary & medicine were issued respectively in 1990 and 2002 in Qatar. A Traditional and Alternative Complementary & Medicine Committee was founded in 1990. In 2002, Herbal Department, Food Supplement Department and Cosmetic Department were founded under the Ministry of Health. Influenced by Arab and other countries in Western Asia, Traditional medicine including acupuncture developed fairly well in Qatar.

In January 2016, Qatar’s Council for Healthcare Practitioners (QCHP) passed a resolution, confirming that hijama (traditional Arab bloodletting therapy), homeopathy, chiropractic therapy, Indian herbal medicine and acupuncture are accepted as the “complementary medicines” that are to enjoy equal legal status with western medicine.

Now Chinese medicine acupuncturists can serve as “complementary medicine” physicians and can register to practice TCM and Acupuncture in Qatar. The Complementary Medicine Committee of Ministry of Public Health is responsible for the administration regulation and management.

Qatar’s Council for Healthcare Practitioners (QCHP) announces that *The Regulation of Complementary Medicine (CM)* has been officially approved by the QCHP Board. *The Regulation of Complementary Medicine* by QCHP has been one of the decisions long-awaited by the public in Qatar. “However, as our main concern is always patient safety, we wanted to assess the impact of this decision before beginning the official implementation”, said QCHP’s Acting CEO, Dr. Samar Aboulsoud. An Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee was setup by the QCHP

Board to review the regulatory framework, compile scientific evidence related to the regulation, safety and efficacy of CM practices as well as measure the scientific impacts and provide facts & figures in relation to the usage and impact of CM within the State of Qatar.

The proposed regulatory framework has been approved by the QCHP Board and an implementation plan has been developed for early 2016. Dr. Aboulsoud stated, “We wanted to address all our concerns to have a solid ground about the existence of scientific studies on the impact of CM”. “Moreover, the concept of “complementary” medicine will be adopted rather than alternative & complementary medicine to guarantee that patients will receive complementary treatment in addition to conventional medical treatment”. A number of awareness workshops will also be held in the Supreme Council of Health to raise the public’s awareness about important facts regarding complementary medicine, its history, impacts and how it is regulated around the world. The initial list of scopes that will be regulated includes, “Hijama/ Wet Cupping, Chiropractic, Homeopathy, Ayurveda and Acupuncture.” This decision will provide a legal framework to CM to ensure that the benefits of these practices could be enjoyed without unnecessary risks. The regulatory framework will standardize the CM practice so that only licensed, qualified practitioners will be issued a medical license and allowed to practice in the State of Qatar. In this regard, the Registration Department at QCHP is in the process of analyzing the current situation and is working extensively to create a specially customized transitional plan that will provide a roadmap for the existing practitioners. Those practitioners will be given a grace period to correct and fix their situation in order to become fully registered and permitted to practice legally in the State of Qatar<sup>[3]</sup>.

According to the *Regulations of Complementary Medicine Physicians Registration* issued by the Ministry of Public Health, “acupuncture” is an ancient therapy that the acupuncture points are carefully chosen along the human body meridians or energy channels and the fine needles are pierced into the acupuncture points.

Acupuncture is applied for the purpose of treating diseases by regulating *qi*. Electrophysiological experiments have proved the existence of meridians that are used for the location of the acupuncture points. The profession scope of registered acupuncturists includes acupuncture, moxibustion,

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