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## OPINION COLUMN

# Effectiveness of traditional Chinese medicine outweighs opponent's claims



By Melissa Carr, Special to 24 hours  
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Traditional Chinese medicine may have its detractors, but what many fail to note is how the ancient practice is a safe, valid and cost-effective alternative to supplementing conventional treatments. (24 HOURS FILE PHOTO)

In the article 'Chinese medicine foe slams school' published in *24 hours* on Jan. 8, Albert Zhang, a Beijing-based opponent of traditional Chinese medicine, stated a B.C. government plan to fund a school teaching the discipline "will waste many resources" and pass on techniques he alleges can be dangerous.

There are two main questions raised by this article. One, is TCM an effective medicine that can be safely practiced? And secondly, is it a good idea for Victoria to fund such a program at one of our public universities?

First, it's important to do more than just throw back reminders about the statistics of deaths caused by pharmaceuticals; about the high costs of modern medicine; about the inherent flaws in our modern science and research; or about the growing numbers of patients dissatisfied by the conventional care system's approach to their chronic disease.

Zhang tries to alarm the public about the “dangers” of TCM. Though a powerful practice, the ancient practice is safe. In B.C., TCM is a regulated health profession, and only licensed and registered professionals can practice. Safety courses are mandatory and cover hygienic practice, point anatomy, herb pharmacology, ethical issues and more.

In a time of technology-focused quick fixes, TCM has managed to gain ground in its use around the world because it is effective. The World Health Organization supports its use for more than 50 health conditions. There are good studies available for a variety of health conditions, including pain, fertility and digestive issues. There are studies to demonstrate that acupuncture boosts endorphins, improves circulation and changes brain activity to effect whole body changes.

Pharmaceuticals, surgeries, MRIs, CT scans, and other advanced testing methods of the conventional care model are expensive. TCM offers high-skill, low-technology options that can be integrated into the current system. In addition, holistic therapists teach patients how to be an integral part of the wellness plan, offering guidance for lifestyle changes contributing to long-term health benefits.

This knowledge and these skills must be taught to TCM students. With the growing public demand for health practices and treatments that can be integrated into a conventional care plan, it's wise for the government to be funding options. With better chronic-illness prevention and disease management we stand to save money in the long-term.

Zhang said that “there are many Chinese people who don’t even believe in TCM.” This debate is not about belief. It is about facts, and the fact is that TCM is safe, effective, and a lower-cost option to be integrated into our conventional medical system.

*Melissa Carr is a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, caring for patients in an integrative medicine clinic in Vancouver.*

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If the debate isn't about "effectiveness", then why not give the patient some placebo (sugar pills)? Wouldn't that be even more cost effective and "safer"?

I went to an acupuncturist for my right-side shoulder pain, and he stuck needles in my left foot (this is not a joke). After half an hour he asked me if the pain in my right shoulder was gone. I did notice a reduction in pain as I lifted up my wallet to pay him (as money was flying out of my wallet, getting lighter)...

No, it didn't work at all. He might as well have stuck the cat next door with needles for my pain.

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The debate is most definitely about effectiveness. We should not spend public money on something that is not effective. There is research supporting acupuncture's (and Traditional Chinese Medicine's) health benefits. Your one case is not indicative of all cases. Nor would one person's statement that acupuncturing their cat cured their shoulder pain indicate that we should take that path. Good evidence is based on large numbers of individuals trialing a remedy. One person finding that aspirin does not cure his/her headache doesn't mean aspirin doesn't help headaches. I'm sorry your shoulder wasn't cured in one treatment. That really may have been unrealistic to expect that quick fix, especially if the pain has been around for some time. I'm assuming, based on your negative attitude toward acupuncture, that this was not your first therapy of choice to resolve your pain. There is a growing body of evidence--officially researched and clinical studies--to support what I, and many others, have found to be a powerful medical system. Thank you for your comment though, as I think of this as a great opportunity to create discussion and debunk some myths and misconceptions.

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