

University of Technology Sydney

Faculty of Science

School of Life Sciences

**A Comparative Study of Cross Discipline Referral
Patterns of Chinese Medicine Association Practitioners
Over a Ten-Year Period (2006 - 2016): An Australian
National Study**

A Thesis submitted as partial requirement for the degree of

Master of Science (Research)

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

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CONTENTS

	Page Number
Acknowledgements	I
Contents	II
List of tables	VI
List of figures	VII
Abstract	X
Chapter 1 - Introduction	1
1.1 - Rationale for the study	1
1.2 - Aim of the study	2
1.3 - Format of thesis	3
Chapter 2 - Background	4
2.1 - Integrative Medicine	4
2.2 - The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency and the Chinese Medicine Board of Australia	5
2.3 - Clinical communication in integrative care	6
Chapter 3 - Literature Review	8
3.1 - Introduction	8
3.2 - Methods	9
3.3 - Results	11
3.3.1 - General observations regarding the studies found and their localities	11
3.3.2 - CM practitioners' referral practices	12
3.3.3 - Medical practitioners' referral practices to CM practitioners	14
3.3.3.1 - Studies originating from the United States of America	21
3.3.3.2 - Studies originating from the United Kingdom	23
3.3.3.3 - Studies originating from Australia	25
3.3.3.4 - Studies originating singularly from all other countries	26
3.3.4 - Patients' recommendations or referral practices	28

to CM practitioners	
3.4 - Discussion	32
3.4.1 - Clinical referral practices of CM practitioners	32
3.4.2 - Clinical referral practices of medical practitioners to CM practitioners	33
3.4.3 - Recommendations / referral practices of Patients to CM practitioners	34
3.4.4 - Education and training to foster knowledge and familiarity	34
3.4.5 - Practical barriers in the referral relationship between professions	35
3.5 - Conclusion	36
Chapter 4 - Methods	37
4.1 - Design	37
4.2 - Data collection	39
4.3 - Ethics approval	39
4.4 - Statistical analysis	40
Chapter 5 - Results	41
5.1 - Age	41
5.2 - Gender	43
5.3 - Practice locality	43
5.4 - Duration of clinical practice as a CM practitioner	45
5.5 - Practice hours	46
5.6 - Type of practice within premises	47
5.7 - Clinical colleagues within premises	48
5.8 - Level of training and formal education in CM	50
5.9 - Location of CM institution where training was undertaken	51
5.10 - CM education institutions within Australia	52
5.11 - Type of CM institution where training was undertaken	53
5.12 - CM education undertaken overseas (outside of Australia)	54
5.13 - CM modalities used in clinical practice	55
5.14 - Combining treatment modalities within clinical practice	56
5.15 - Number of clinical patients treated per week	58
5.16 - Referral behaviour to a medical practitioner (specialist and/or GP)	59

5.17 - Patient referral frequency to a medical practitioner (specialist and/or GP)	60
5.18 - Patient referral frequency to a hospital	61
5.19 - Difficulties when referring to a medical practitioner	62
5.20 - Clinical patient referral from a medical practitioner	63
5.21 - Frequency of clinical referral from a medical practitioner over the past year	64
5.22 - Clinical information disclosed with referral to another health practitioner	66
5.23 - Clinical communication follow-up to referring medical practitioner	70
5.24 - Refusal of a referral from a medical practitioner	71
5.25 - Clinical referral from medical specialists	72
5.26 - Referrals in relation to insurance claims	75
5.27 - Referrals to other allied health and CAM practitioners	75
5.28 - Provision of written contact with referral to other allied health and CAM practitioners	77
5.29 - Verbal contact with referral to other allied health / CAM practitioners	77
5.30 - Provision of clinical information with referral made to other allied health and CAM practitioners	79
5.31 - Referrals received from other allied health and CAM practitioners	83
5.32 - Referral practices of other allied health and CAM practitioners to CM practitioners	84
5.33 - Clinical information provided with referral from other allied health and CAM practitioners	85
5.34 - Group of allied health and CAM practitioners most likely to provide adequate clinical information	89
 Chapter 6 - Discussion	 90
6.1 - Overview	90
6.2 - Demographic data	90
6.2.1 - Respondent characteristics	91
6.2.2 - Education and professional training	92
6.2.3 - Clinical practice characteristics	93
6.3 - Clinical referral practices and behaviours data	94
6.3.1 - Respondents' referral characteristics / practices / behaviours	94
6.3.1.1 - Respondents' referral practices to medical professionals	94

6.3.1.2 - Respondents' referral practices to allied health and CAM	95
6.3.2 - Referral characteristics / practices / behaviours of other types of practitioners when referring a patient to CM	96
6.3.2.1 - Patient referrals from medical practitioners	96
6.3.2.2 - Referrals related to specialist medical practitioners and Insurance-related claims	97
6.3.2.3 - Referrals from allied health and CAM practitioners	97
6.3.3 - Written and verbal referrals	98
6.3.4 - Clinical information provided with referral	99
6.3.5 - Difficulties when referring	100
6.4 - Trends and results that have not changed over 10 years	102
6.5 - Limitations of the study	102
 Chapter 7 - Conclusion	 104
 References	 107
 Appendices	 115
Appendix 1 - CMBA Code of Conduct	115
Appendix 2 - CMBA Registrant Data	116
Appendix 3 - 2006 survey version	123
Appendix 4 - 2016 survey version	127
Appendix 5 - Chi square tables	135
Appendix 6 - 2006 survey demographic results paper	141

LIST OF TABLES

	Page Number
3.1 - Overview of studies that examined CM practitioners' referral practices	13
3.2 - Overview of studies that examined medical practitioners' referral practices to CM practitioners	15
3.3 - Overview of studies that examined patients' recommendations or referral practices to CM practitioners	29
5.1 - CMBA Registrant Data for age	42
5.2 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' clinical practice duration	46
5.3 - 2006 respondents' clinical colleagues within premises	49
5.4 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' CM training and/or qualifications	51
5.5 - Comparison of differing interval ranges for the same question across both 2006 and 2016 survey versions, with the final intervals for the purpose of data analyses	58
5.6 - 2016 respondents' referrals received from medical specialists	73
5.7 - 2016 respondents' referrals made to medical specialists	74
5.8 - Allied health and CAM practitioners frequently referred to by CM practitioners	76
5.9 - Allied health and CAM practitioners' referral frequency to CM practitioners	83

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page Number
3.1 - Flowchart of literature search process	10
3.2 - Differentiation of search results according to country of origin and category type	12
5.1 - 2016 respondents' age	41
5.2 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' age	42
5.3 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' gender distribution, with CMBA Registrant Data for gender	43
5.4 - 2016 respondents' practice locations, sorted by State	44
5.5 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' practice locations, plus CMBA Registrant Data for principal place of practice, sorted by State	44
5.6 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' clinical practice hours	47
5.7 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' type of practice within premises	48
5.8 - 2016 respondents' clinical colleagues within premises	49
5.9 - 2016 respondents' CM training and/or qualifications	50
5.10 - 2006 respondents' CM education provider / institution locations	51
5.11 - 2016 respondents' CM education provider, sorted by State	52
5.12 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' CM education provider, sorted by State	53
5.13 - 2016 respondents' CM educational institution type	53
5.14 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' CM educational institution type	54
5.15 - 2006 respondents' CM education and/or training undertaken outside of Australia	55
5.16 - 2016 respondents' main CM modalities employed in clinical practice	56
5.17 - 2016 respondents' tendencies to combine CM treatment modalities in clinical practice	57
5.18 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' tendencies to combine CM treatment modalities in clinical practice	57
5.19 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' weekly approximate patient intake	59
5.20 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' referral practices to medical practitioners	60
5.21 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' referral frequency	61

to a medical practitioner	
5.22 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' referral frequency to a hospital	62
5.23 - Common difficulties when referring to a medical practitioner as indicated by 2016 participants	63
5.24 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' referrals received from a medical practitioner	64
5.25 - 2016 respondents' referral frequency, received from a medical practitioner over the past 12 months	65
5.26 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' referral frequency, received from a medical practitioner over the past 12 months	65
5.27 - 2016 respondents' referrals received with a patient's Case Report	67
5.28 - 2016 respondents' referrals received with a patient's Clinical Records	67
5.29 - 2016 respondents' referrals received with a patient's Reason for Referral	68
5.30 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' referrals received with a patient's Case Report	68
5.31 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' referrals received with a patient's Clinical Records	69
5.32 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' referrals received with a patient's Reason for Referral	69
5.33 - 2016 respondents' provision frequency of follow-up clinical communication to the referring medical practitioner	70
5.34 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' provision frequency of follow-up clinical communication to the referring medical practitioner	71
5.35 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' tendencies to refuse a referral from a medical practitioner	72
5.36 - 2016 respondents' referrals received in relation to insurance claims	75
5.37 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' tendencies to provide written contact with patient referral	77
5.38 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' tendencies to provide verbal contact with patient referral	78
5.39 - 2016 respondents' provision of Case Reports with their patient referrals	80
5.40 - 2016 respondents' provision of Clinical Records with their patient referrals	80
5.41 - 2016 respondents' provision of Reason for Referral with their	81

patient referrals	
5.42 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' provision of Case Reports with their patient referrals	81
5.43 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' provision of Clinical Records with their patient referrals	82
5.44 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' provision of Reason for Referral with their patient referral	82
5.45 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' referrals received from other allied health and CAM practitioners, and initiation of contact behaviours	85
5.46 - 2016 respondents' referrals received with a patient's Case Report from the referring practitioner	86
5.47 - 2016 respondents' referrals received with a patient's Clinical Records from the referring practitioner	86
5.48 - 2016 respondents' referrals received with a patient's Reason for Referral from the referring practitioner	87
5.49 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' referrals received with a patient's Case Report from the referring practitioner	87
5.50 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' referrals received with a patient's Clinical Records	88
5.51 - Comparison of 2006 and 2016 respondents' referrals received with a patient's Reason for Referral from the referring practitioner	88

ABSTRACT

Background: The concept of patient-centred care has spurred the frequent involvement of multiple healthcare practitioners for a single patient. This raises professional considerations regarding clinical communication, which have health and safety impacts. Chinese Medicine (CM), which is classified as a Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) practice, has recently undergone national registration and regulation within Australia reflecting its growing popularity. Currently, referral practices and behaviours of CM practitioners have not been researched. A survey was therefore undertaken to determine current referral practices and behaviours within a major Australian professional association.

Method: Data was collected from two sources. The first was retrospective, collected in 2006 (n = 386). The second dataset was generated by using a revised survey based on the 2006 version (n = 112). Both surveys were administered to members of the Australian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association, the peak professional body representing CM practitioners in Australia. Survey 1 was administered in hardcopy while survey 2 was administered through an online platform (Survey Monkey).

Results: It was found that over the ten-year period, some aspects of the practitioners' referral practices had not statistically changed. There were however, statistically significant changes observed for some aspects. This included an increase in the provision of written referral contact; a decrease in the provision of verbal referral contact by CM practitioners to other allied health and CAM practitioner; as well as a statistically significant change in the provision of referral reason to other allied health and CAM practitioners.

Conclusion: Strategies to improve referral practices and behaviours of CM practitioners such as inter-disciplinary education and inter-professional communication needs to be further encouraged to achieve improved referral practices in a patient-centred environment.