

Towards Integrative Health Care. The perspectives and experiences of Chinese Medicine Practitioners (CMPs) and General Medical Practitioners (GPs)

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Nga Chong Lisa CHENG declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of PhD, in the Faculty of Science at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. The content of the project is the result of work that has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	5
List of Tables	6
Acknowledgements	8
Abstract	10
Abbreviations	12
Chapter 1: Introduction	13
1.0: <i>Study Background</i>	13
1.1: <i>Background to the Professions and Definitions</i>	13
1.2: <i>Research Rationale</i>	16
1.3: <i>Research Aims</i>	17
1.4: <i>Study Hypothesis</i>	17
1.5: <i>Research Objectives</i>	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review	18
2.1 <i>Introduction</i>	18
2.2 <i>Material and Methods</i>	19
2.2.1 Systematic Literature Search.....	19
2.2.2 Inclusion Criteria	20
2.2.3 Exclusion Criteria.....	20
2.2.4 Result of the literature search.....	21
2.2.5 Primary literature review	23
2.2.5.1 Qualitative studies	23
2.2.5.2 Quantitative Studies.....	27
2.2.5.3 Mixed Studies	29
2.2.6 Literature review summary	30
2.3 <i>Development of the survey instruments</i>	32
2.4 <i>Summary</i>	33
Chapter 3: Study Design - Survey	34
3.1 <i>Aim</i>	34
3.2 <i>Methods</i>	34
3.2.1 Inclusion criteria	35
3.2.2 Exclusion criteria	35
3.3 <i>Recruitment procedures</i>	35
3.4 <i>Ethics Approval</i>	35
Chapter 4: Survey Results	36
4.1 <i>Introduction</i>	36
4.2 <i>Demographics</i>	36
4.3 <i>Data Analysis</i>	39
Chapter 5: Survey Results Summary	40
5.1 <i>Chinese Medicine Practitioners</i>	40
5.2 <i>General Medical Practitioners</i>	50
Chapter 6 – Survey CONCLUSION	60
Chapter 7: Study Design – FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION	62
7.1 <i>Aim</i>	62
7.2 <i>Methods</i>	62
7.3 <i>Recruitment procedures</i>	62
7.4 <i>Ethics Approval</i>	63
Chapter 8: Qualitative Component Results	64

<i>8.2 Theme 2: Avoiding legal responsibilities and liabilities.....</i>	66
<i>8.3 Theme 3: Observing the negative effects of CM.....</i>	67
<i>8.4 Theme 4: Needing to consult with General Medical Practitioners first before the Chinese Medicine Practitioners.....</i>	68
<i>8.5 Theme 5: Lacking knowledge on the legitimacy of the CM.....</i>	69
Chapter 9: Summary.....	72
Chapter 10: Discussion.....	74
Chapter 11: Conclusion	83
References	85
Appendices	89
<i>Appendix 1 – Survey invitation and Information statement.....</i>	89
<i>Appendix 2 – Informed Consent Form.....</i>	91
<i>Appendix 3: Surveys.....</i>	92
Survey 1 – Chinese Medicine Practitioners (Frenkel 2008)	92
Survey 2 – General Practitioners (Wahner-Roedler 2006)	96
<i>Appendix 4: Interview schedule.....</i>	100
<i>Appendix 5 – External organisational approval letters.....</i>	102

List of Figures

Figure 1: Flow diagram of studies for inclusion in the literature review	22
Figure 2: CMP: CM treatments practiced during the past year	41
Figure 3: CMP: Reasons why patients see the practitioners	42
Figure 4: CMP: Extent to which the CM treatments contribute to maintaining good health and well-being	43
Figure 5: CMP: Extent to which the CM treatments are believed to be safe	44
Figure 6: CMP: Perceptions on the result/s of the collaboration between CM providers with General Medical Practitioners	45
Figure 7: CMP: Expectations from the patient's General Medical Practitioner regarding CM usage	46
Figure 8: CMP: Preferred setting for the CM to be provided to patients	47
Figure 9: CMP: Who should refer patient/s to receive these therapies	48
Figure 10: CMP: Who should provide CM treatments in a family medical centre	49
Figure 11: GP: CM treatments practiced during the past year	50
Figure 12: GP: Reasons why CM was recommended	52
Figure 13: GP: Extent to which the CM treatments contribute to maintaining good health and well-being	53
Figure 14: GP: Extent to which the CM treatments are believed to be safe	54
Figure 15: GP: Perceptions on the result/s of the collaboration between CM providers with General Medical Practitioners	55
Figure 16: GP: Expectations from the patient's General Medical Practitioner regarding CM usage	56
Figure 17: GP: Preferred setting for the CM to be provided to patients	57
Figure 18: GP: Who should refer patient/s to receive these therapies	58
Figure 19: GP: Who should provide CM treatments in a family medical centre	60

List of Tables

Table 1: Medical Practitioners – percentage by state or territory	14
Table 2: General Practice specialisation within Medical practitioners – with comparison to some examples of some other areas of specialist practice	15
Table 3: Registration type of Chinese medicine practitioners by principal place of practice	16
Table 4: Physician's attitude on complementary and alternative medicine therapies	32
Table 5: Demographics of the 72 Chinese Medicine Practitioners	37
Table 6: Demographics of the 67 General Medical Practitioners	38
Table 7: CMP: CM treatments practiced during the past year	41
Table 8: CMP: Reasons why patients see the practitioners	42
Table 9: CMP: Extent to which the CM treatments contribute to maintaining good health and well-being	43
Table 10: CMP: Extent to which the CM treatments are believed to be safe	44
Table 11: CMP: Perceptions on the result/s of the collaboration between CM providers with General Medical Practitioners	45
Table 12: CMP: Expectations from the patient's General Medical Practitioners regarding CM usage	46
Table 13: CMP: Preferred setting for the CM to be provided to patients	47
Table 14: CMP: Who should refer patient/s to receive these therapies	48
Table 15: CMP: Who should provide CM treatments in a family medical centre	49
Table 16: GP: CM treatments practiced during the past year	51
Table 17: GP: Reasons why CM was recommended	52
Table 18: GP: Extent to which the CM treatments contribute to maintaining good health and well-being	53
Table 19: GP: Extent to which the CM treatments are believed to be safe	54
Table 20: GP: Perceptions on the result/s of the collaboration between CM providers with General Medical Practitioners	55
Table 21: GP: Expectations from the patient's General Medical Practitioner regarding CM usage	56
Table 22: GP: Preferred setting for the CM to be provided to patients	57
Table 23: GP: Who should refer patient/s to receive these therapies	58

Table 24: GP: Who should provide CM treatments in a family medical centre	60
Table 25: Survey results: Chinese Medicine Practitioners versus General Medical Practitioners	72
Table 26: Themes based on the GPs' focus group discussion	73

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Abstract

Australia is a country with multiculturalism. The collaboration between General Medical Practitioners (GPs) and Chinese Medicine Practitioners (CMPs) is vital for the holistic management and safety for patients who utilise both medical systems. This study aims to identify the differences in perspective and beliefs of GPs towards CMPs and their practices. This research will focus on New South Wales region, especially Sydney as the setting for the research. This research study consists of seven phases.

According to the literature review, there was a gap in knowledge concerning communication between CMPs and GPs. One study reviewed found that young GPs in Hong Kong have a negative bias against CMPs and believed them to be unscientific. There were scant researches that have been undertaken and no in-depth investigation on the perspectives and beliefs held by both the GPs and CMPs undertaken in the Australian environment where Chinese Medicine (CM) is registered under the national law.

Drawing on the literature review, a quantitative study was developed to obtain relevant information. According to the survey's finding, there were several questions where the two groups have different responses. CMPs believed that CM has a role in contributing to good health and wellbeing and had a high safety profile, whilst most GPs were impartial concerning the contribution of CM to good health and wellbeing. Only 57% of GPs believed that CM was fairly safe but 37% were unsure regarding CM's safety profile. Collaboration between the CMPs and GPs was believed to be beneficial by both groups. Nevertheless, CMPs would like GPs to make increasing use of referral and support the patient's request, however only 43% of GPs were willing to make the referral to CMPs.

The qualitative study (focus group) identified five main themes behind this lack in communication. These included 1) lack of knowledge of the legitimacy of CM, 2) lack of awareness of any proven

effectiveness, 3) observation of the negative effects, 4) belief that patients should consult a GP prior to attending a CMP, and 5) reluctance to referral to a CMP due to legal responsibilities and liabilities.

This study had a relatively small sample size. However, it is anticipated that futures studies will extend to a wider community and sample. Regulation of the referral process could also potentially address this communication gap. The ultimate aim for both groups of health care practitioners is to provide patient-centred care and high level of safety.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
CAM	Complementary and Alternative Medicine
CM	Chinese Medicine
CMPs	Chinese Medicine Practitioners
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GPs	General Medical Practitioners
NRAS	National Registration and Accreditation Scheme
TCM	Traditional Chinese Medicine
WHO	World Health Organisation