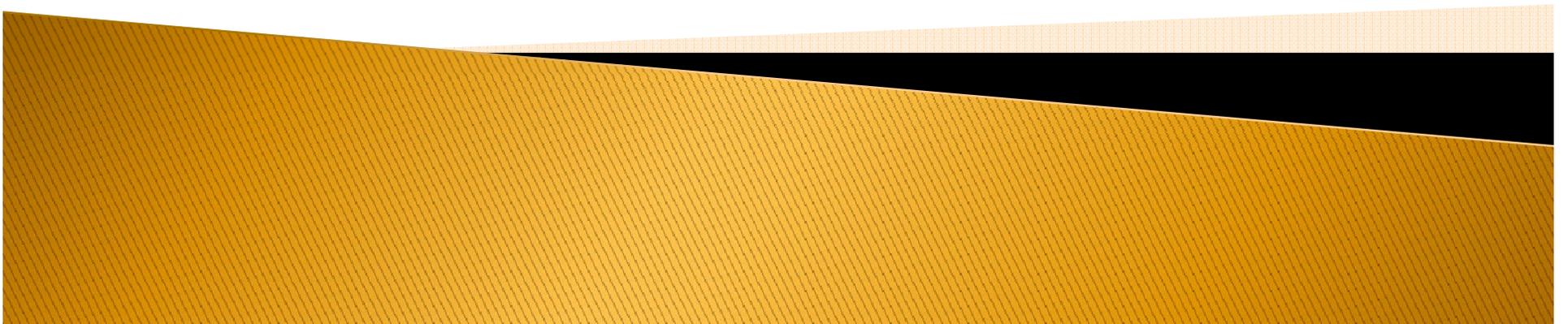


# Traditional Medicine: An Introduction

By Elizabeth Cooper



# What is Traditional Medicine?

“Traditional medicine is the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.”

WHO- definitions



# Terms to know:

- ▶ Alternative Medicine
- ▶ Complementary Medicine
- ▶ Ethnomedicine
- ▶ Faith Healing
- ▶ Herbal Medicine
- ▶ Holistic Medicine
- ▶ Natural medicine/Naturopathy
- ▶ Non-conventional Medicine
- ▶ Parallel Medicine
- ▶ Therapeutic Activities
- ▶ Unconventional/Unorthodox Medicine



- ▶ The use of ‘traditional medicine’ predates biomedical advances.
- ▶ Traditional medicine has many different uses, and depends on both the context and the healer.



- ▶ Traditional healers are gatekeepers within many community contexts.
- ▶ Often traditional medicine is the only means of healthcare available to people, especially those in remote regions of the world.
- ▶ To ‘discount’ traditional medicine is seen as a sign of disrespect for a community’s beliefs/approaches



- ▶ In some parts of Asia and Africa, it is estimated that 80% of people rely upon traditional medicine for their healthcare needs.
- ▶ In developed countries, it is estimated that 70% of people rely upon traditional medicine to supplement their healthcare needs.



# Frequently cited arguments for the utilization of traditional medicine

1. The tautology of biomedicine and alternative therapies must be recognized, if not legitimized.
2. Traditional medicine often has a spiritual component, which is frequently segregated within the Cartesian health model.
3. Traditional medicine has stood the test of time.



# Biomedicine and Traditional Medicine

- ▶ Development of a shared understanding leads to increased patient safety.
- ▶ Patient disclosure of different treatment measures is vital.
- ▶ Uptake of medical advances should not be minimized, i.e. vaccine safety.



# Example 1: Traditional Medicine Gone Wrong

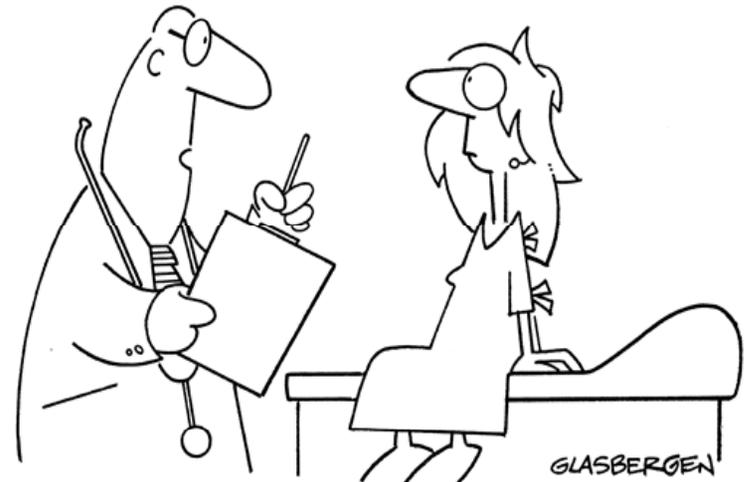
- ▶ Gambian AIDS 'cure'
- ▶ 7 herbs, 3 from Gambia. Rub on chest and ingest prior to consuming 2 bananas.
- ▶ Who is an expert?
- ▶ Who has an authoritative voice?
- ▶ The promise of a cure.



# Example 2: When all else fails...

- ▶ Notions of 'patienthood'
- ▶ Sociocultural assumptions
- ▶ Fear and anxiety contribute to decision-making

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"You're in perfect health. Wait here while I check what you should take for that."

## WHO 2009 recommendations include:

- ▶ To further **develop traditional medicine based on research and innovation** giving due consideration to the specific actions related to traditional medicine **in the implementation of the Global strategy** and plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property;
- ▶ To consider **strengthening communication between conventional and traditional medicine providers** and, where appropriate, establishing appropriate training programs for health professionals, medical students and relevant researchers



# CONCLUSIONS

- ▶ Individuals come from a variety of ontological perspectives. The decisions made by an individual depends largely upon his/her positionality.
- ▶ Optimal uptake of biomedical procedures must take into account the intrinsic value placed within a community on traditional medicine.
- ▶ Contextualizing the accessibility, uptake and access to various treatments should be considered by decision-makers, health professionals and researchers.



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