

## Letter to the Editor

### TCM practice in China

Sir,

To follow up on your special issue on medicinal herbs<sup>1</sup>, your readers should be interested in the following information on Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) in China today.

There are currently 2600 TCM hospitals in China with over a half million TCM professionals. Two major categories of TCM professionals are TCM *physicians*, who are responsible for clinical diagnosis and treatment of various common diseases, and TCM *herbalists*, who are responsible for preparing Chinese medicine. In total, 340 000 TCM physicians and 160 000 TCM herbalists are currently practising in China (1.7 million Western doctors, 230 000 Western pharmacists)<sup>2</sup>.

Thirty TCM universities and colleges and 22 TCM departments in general Western medical universities/colleges graduate 10 000 students each year (90 Western medical universities). In addition, there are over 50 secondary TCM schools with 17 000 graduating students each year<sup>2</sup>. TCM universities and colleges provide higher-level training to students with 12 years of general education, secondary TCM schools recruit students with 9 years of general education.

Chinese herbal products are well accepted by physicians and patients in China. The annual sales of Chinese medicine in China were over US\$1.5 billion in 1995. They

are exported to 130 countries and the total export was about US\$600 million in 2000<sup>2</sup>. Although export is low compared with Japan and South Korea, there is an increasing trend in both China and the world market for Chinese herbal medicine.

Traditional Chinese Medicine was, is and will continually be an important part of China's healthcare system.

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#### References

- 1 Arab L, ed. The efficacy and safety of medicinal herbs [special issue]. *Public Health Nutr.* 2000; **3**(4A): 445–535.
- 2 Zhang WK. *China Health Statistics Yearbook*. Beijing: People's Medical Publishing House, 2000.