Chinese Medicine Education at the Chinese University of Hong Kong

by Chun-Tao Che

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) has long been involved in the research and development of Chinese medicine in Hong Kong. Back in the mid-1970s, CUHK was the first higher educational institution in Hong Kong launching a number of research projects in acupuncture and medicinal herbs, leading to the formation of the Chinese Medicinal Material Research Centre.

The School of Chinese Medicine was officially established in December 1998 within the Faculty of Science.

Chinese Medicine Curricula

The design of Chinese medicine curricula is by no means an easy task. On the one hand, there is no precedence of any tertiary Chinese medicine educational model available in Hong Kong. On the other, a set of rules laid down by the government spelling out the requirements for Chinese medicine registration had to be fulfilled. Because the existing medical regulations prohibit the practice of integrated Chinese medicine and Western medicine, the curricula widely adopted in Mainland China were thus not readily duplicated in Hong Kong. Hong Kong needs to create Chinese medicine curricula of its own.

The aim of the curricula is to produce new generations of Chinese medicine practitioners who are not only qualified and competent to provide Chinese medicine care to clients but also capable of communicating with their conventional medical counterparts, i.e. general practitioners and other orthodox medical specialists, in order to decide on the best treatment for the patients. It is also our goal to develop the students’ abilities to critically evaluate literature information and to conduct clinical research that will underpin evidence-based practice.

Currently, the five-year undergraduate Chinese medicine curriculum leading to a Bachelor of Chinese Medicine degree encompasses three and a half years of theoretical studies at the School and one and a half years of clinical placement. It is mandatory for the students in the program to complete subjects in basic medical and life sciences, integrated medical subjects, Chinese medicine concepts and theories, Chinese medicine materials, as well as diagnosis and therapeutic approaches of various specialties in Chinese medicine including internal medicine, gynecology, pediatrics, surgery, bone setting, acupuncture and moxibustion. As a Chinese medicine hospital is yet to be set up in Hong Kong, we have to rely on the support from the Guangzhou University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, which provides clinical training facilities for our students to study in its affiliated hospitals. During their clinical placement, students spend time in various specialty wards to acquire clinical skills. In addition to clinical training in the hospitals, students also attend Chinese medicine outpatient clinics in Hong Kong in order to gain additional experience as general practitioners. Through the implementation of this curriculum, we expect the students to gain necessary theoretical knowledge and receive sufficient clinical training that allows them to start a professional career.
Graduates from the program will also have a sound biomedical knowledge to communicate with their colleagues in conventional medicine. The interaction established through this communication will only serve to enhance the quality of patient care.

Postgraduate Programs and Research Activities

In addition to the undergraduate course, the School has also successfully launched several postgraduate programs in various Chinese medicine disciplines. These include research programs leading to Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees, as well as a Master of Science (MSc) degree program in Chinese Medicine. A Master of Science (MSc) degree in Acupuncture will be launched in 2004.

While praising itself as in the forefront of providing a high quality of academic teaching and training in Chinese medicine in Hong Kong, the School also enthusiastically embarks on a wide array of scholarly activities in the areas of research and publication. The ongoing research programs at the School cover a wide array of topics including the following areas:

- Standardization and analysis of Chinese medicinal materials;
- Plant chemistry and discovery of biologically active components from Chinese medicines;
- Pharmacological and biochemical properties of Chinese medicines;
- Development of botanical products for health; and
- Evidence-based and clinical study of Chinese medicine.

The research projects listed above have resulted in the publication of a number of original articles in international journals.

The School has formed an intimate partnership with the Institute of Chinese Medicine (ICM), a research institute at CUHK, to provide research opportunities for MPhil and PhD students. Designated as a member of Area of Excellence in the field of Chinese medicine by the Hong Kong University Grants Council, the ICM is currently leading a series of interdisciplinary and inter-university projects, including a number of clinical trials of Chinese medicine at the Prince of Wales Hospital of Hong Kong.

Sub-degree Programs

The School of Chinese Medicine is fully aware of the needs and expectations of the local Chinese medicine community for their professional development. We are now offering a series of academic training programs at sub-degree levels, such as part-time and evening continuing education courses. These include a Diploma Program in Bone Setting and a Diploma Program in Chinese Medicine. It is also worth mentioning that certificate courses on introductory Chinese medicine are being offered to the medical professionals such as registered physicians, nurses, physiotherapists and pharmacists. These courses aim to foster the spirit of mutual understanding and collaboration among Chinese medicine practitioners and the mainstream medical professionals so as to provide additional dimensions of medical care to the general public in the new age of Hong Kong.

General Education in Chinese Medicine

Chinese medicine is generally perceived as more than a mere academic discipline — it is also
a way of life for most Hong Kong citizens. The School of Chinese Medicine takes as its incumbent
duty of disseminating knowledge of Chinese medicine and educating general public about
health preservation and disease prevention. Staff members of the School regularly participate
in public seminars within or outside the University campus to promote general awareness of
health and disease. During the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak, which
adversely affected all walks of life in Hong Kong earlier this year, the School of Chinese Medicine
organized several public symposia with the aim of promoting the notion of using Chinese
medicine to prevent the disease. All these efforts in spreading the use of Chinese medicine and
in providing services to the community when it is most needed have generated a flood of
positive feedback and appraisals.

To fulfill our commitment to promote Chinese medicine among the general public and to
provide high-quality reading materials for public education, the School has so far produced a
set of reading materials entitled Chinese Medical Culture Series, including the following six
volumes: An Introduction to Chinese Medicinal Materials (1998), Literature Classics of Chinese
Medicine (1998), A New Compilation of Standing Prescriptions (1999), An Introduction to
Bencao Study (1999), An Overview of the Viscera Concept in Chinese Medicine (1999), and A
Revised Edition on Medicinal Diets (in press).

Looking Ahead

While reflecting on the past five years during which the School has made remarkable progress
in the curriculum development, academic research and serving the community, we also
recognize that there is a lot more to be done. In recent years, the government of the Hong
Kong Special Administrative Region has set an ambitious task of establishing Hong Kong as an
international center for Chinese Medicine. In this context, educating and training high quality
Chinese medicine personnel are key factors in realizing this goal. The Chinese University of
Hong Kong has made important contributions in this respect and will in the future endeavor to
become a center of excellence in Chinese medicine education in Hong Kong, and continue its
efforts in gaining international recognition through active academic research.

Contact Details:
Dr Chun-Tao Che
Address: Director, School of Chinese Medicine,
The Chinese University of Hong Kong,
Hong Kong
Email: chect@cuhk.edu.hk