

'TCM an arcane away of potions and herbal mixtures'

Toil and trouble in China over Nobel medicine prize

BEIJING, Dec 2, (AFP): China's Tu Youyou collects her country's first Nobel Prize for medicine next week for extracting an anti-malarial drug from a herb mentioned in a traditional text, but her award has prompted debate over the role of science in the practice.

Tu derived artemisinin from sweet wormwood, which she found cited in a 4th century traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) document as a fever treatment, developing a crucial weapon in the global fight against the mosquito-borne disease as resistance to other treatments spread.

Traditional medicine is a source of cultural pride in some Chinese quarters, with Beijing planning to expand its provision, and even Premier Li Keqiang seized on the Nobel award, hailing Tu's discovery as "a great contribution of TCM to the cause of human health". But Nobel committee member Hans Forsberg was adamant: "It's very important that we are not giving a prize to the traditional medicine," he said, stressing that the award was only for scientific work that had been inspired by it.

Research

TCM practitioners say her recognition could encourage similar research that may sideline the underpinnings of



Left: Tu Youyou, the first Chinese woman to win a Nobel prize for medicine, delivers a speech at a symposium organized by China's National Health and Family Planning Commission and other departments in Beijing. Right: Various herbs and ingredients used in Chinese traditional medicine for sale at the Caizhuanyue Market in Yulin, southern China's Guangxi region. (AFP)

their theories.

TCM is based on a set of beliefs about human biology, including the existence of a life force, "qi", and that illness is the result of "imbalances" between the five elements — fire, water, earth, metal and wood — in the system.

There is no orthodox evidence for such concepts, and the respected sci-



tific magazine Nature has described TCM as "largely just pseudoscience, with no rational mechanism of action for most of its therapies", calling them an "arcane array of potions and herbal mixtures".

In contrast, Tu chemically extracted the active ingredient of a single plant in isolation.

"Many fear that the recent Nobel

Prize, which celebrates westernised Chinese medicine, will end up doing more harm than good for authentic traditional medical practice," said Lan Jirui, who has a booming TCM private practice in Beijing.

Describing her research as a victory for TCM was "reckless", said the state-run China Daily, arguing that would encourage Westernised reforms that ignore traditional theories about the body as a holistic system.

"You should not use Western science to 'cure' Chinese medicine," Lan said, calling the study of TCM from a rationalist perspective "essentially hopeless".

Complicated

"The human body is very complicated — you cannot see it only as a machine," he added. "The scariest thing is to lack confidence in your own traditions, to allow others to 'update' you, and then destroy what you had."

Many mainstream medicines were originally derived from plants, and some researchers are looking for active ingredients in TCM components, even though Tu failed to find other such drugs despite years of efforts.

"It's good to look into ethnopharmacology," said Tai-Ping Fan, head of the Chinese Medicine Laboratory at the University of Cambridge.

"Medicine has evolved since the dawn of humanity, and science," he added. "We need to have evidence. But there's the possibility now, thanks to science, to begin to discuss this problem, how we can see East and West come together."

With no standardised guidelines, TCM can offer radically different diagnoses — based on observation and pulse-taking — for the same symptoms.

Similarly, prescriptions are highly variable, made up of multiple herbs, minerals and animal parts — sometimes from endangered species, now officially banned — along with massages, acupuncture and other treatments.

"I think it'd be quite good really to find out what is there in rhino horn instead of throwing it all away," said Fan. "Those that have been confiscated can be sent to laboratory and analysed and synthesised."

Excess

TCM is an enormous industry in China, with a total value in excess of \$91 billion in 2013, a third of the total output of the country's medical industry, according to the official news agency Xinhua.

In recent years the government has upped funding and support, even

though most health facilities use orthodox medicine, and national healthcare guidelines released in May said every county and municipality should seek to have a dedicated TCM hospital by 2020.

"TCM should be China's solution for improving its medical care," especially as it was "relatively cheaper than Western medicine", Wang Guoqiang, director of the State Administration of TCM, told a conference last year.

"TCM is a form of heritage passed down from our ancestors that can offer an instructive approach to modern medical reform," he added.

But specialists say there is an internal contradiction between the nationalism implicit in such assertions and TCM's claims of universal applicability.

"It is essential to keep the struggle for cultural identity separate from actual medical practice," said Volker Scheid, an anthropologist at London's University of Westminster who has studied TCM for 30 years.

"I'd say 95 percent of Chinese would think that I cannot be a very good TCM practitioner because I'm not Chinese, but at the same time, China wants to make Chinese medicine global."

"If you want to make it truly global, you have to take it away from China."

Health

Disease mainly hits women in 30s, 40s

Cervical cancer can be averted with screenings

By Dr Aisha Bhaiyat
Special to the Arab Times

In countries such as Canada and the UK, women routinely booked an appointment to have cervical screening. The aim of these screening programs is to prevent cervical cancer. Such screening programs do not exist in Kuwait, although cervical screening is available. So why do I recommend that all women over the age of 20 should consider having cervical screening?

Cervical cancer is a disease that mainly hits women in their 30's and 40's. Occasionally, it can affect older or younger women. Most importantly, this cancer is preventable. Unlike many other cancer screenings, cervical screening looks for changes in the cells that may lead to cancer and not for the actual cancer itself. Therefore cervical cancer is one of the very few cancers that can be detected and prevented before it even begins.

Womb

The cervix is the bottom part of the womb, linking to the vagina. A hole, known as the cervical canal, passes through the cervix. This allows for menstrual flow out and sperm into, the uterus. This also has the ability to widen during birth. The cervix is coated in a skin-like layer, whose cells are collected using a small plastic brush during a cervical smear test. These cells are then put under a microscope to be examined for early changes in the cells that may lead to cervical cancer if left untreated. An abnormal test does not mean that there is cancer of the cervix; it in fact means that through treatment, cancer of the cervix can be prevented. Some women can find cervical screening to be uncomfortable, but rest assured it shouldn't be painful.

The symptoms of cervical cancer can include bleeding after intercourse, in between menstruation as well as after menopause. If you have any of these symptoms, please speak to your doctor urgently, as the cause could be due to a cancer. In this situation, cervical screening would not be appropriate as the test does not look for actual cancers; rather changes in the cells.

What causes cervical cancer? The usual culprit; smoking, can be blamed. However, it is also known that there are particular types of viruses that can cause cervical

cancer. These viruses are part of a group known as Human Papilloma Virus or HPV for short. For a whopping 99% of cervical cancer cases, HPV viruses are at fault. There are many types of HPV viruses, some of which cause warts and cancers and yet others have no effect at all. It's very common for individuals to carry and pass from one person to another through sexual intercourse; one of the types of HPV viruses. But not everyone with HPV gets cervical cancer.

It is possible to test the cervical cells for the presence of HPV. If HPV is absent in the cervical cells, it is unlikely that the patient has cervical cancer. Additionally, young girls between 9 and 18 years of age can get vaccinated against HPV. Boys can also benefit as the vaccine reduces the likelihood of developing some types of anal cancers and warts. This vaccination is routinely offered in many countries including the USA. Although the HPV vaccine does include the main HPV varieties that cause most cervical cancers, it does not cover them all. So cervical screening is still recommended; but getting an abnormal result and needing treatment will be less likely.

Remember to speak to your doctor about having cervical screening and testing for HPV. All it requires are regular screening tests to ensure you're all clear; and if not, treatment in the case of abnormal results to halt the cancer's development. Ensure to take preventative measures for your children as well, through vaccinating them. And so, with all these preventative methods in place, cervical cancers should have a slim chance of getting to you and your family.

Having grown up in Yorkshire, England, Dr. Aisha Bhaiyat obtained her doctor's degree at the University of Cambridge. As a MD and family physician, she can tend to an array of medical health issues covering mental health, women's health and preventative medicine amongst others. Currently working for the Fawzia Sultan Rehabilitation Institute (FSRI); you can get in touch by dialing 2572-1757. For our address, email or further information about FSRI, visit www.fsrikuwait.org



Photos from the event

Embassy of Indonesia holds cultural event

In conjunction with monthly International Women Group's meeting, Madame Marita Razak hosted the cultural event at Ambassador's residence on Nov 30, 2015.

On this occasion several performances and

activities were displayed, namely: cooking demonstration of Indonesian cuisines by Indonesian chefs who work at Regency Kuwait, angklung ensemble, traditional fashion show and mini bazaar of Indonesian products.

The event was attended by spouses of Ambassadors, members of diplomatic corps as well as the interested parties. This also is part of Embassy of Indonesia activities to promote more about Indonesia in Kuwait.

Bid to fight heart disease

NY adopts first US menu salt warnings

NEW YORK, Dec 2, (AFP): New York on Tuesday became the first US city to adopt salt warnings on restaurant menus for food containing more than the daily recommended limit, in a bid to fight heart disease.

The law applies to chains with more than 15 restaurants across the country and enforces a salt shaker icon next to items that contain 2.3 grams or more of sodium — about a teaspoon's worth.

It also requires chains to post a warning statement advising that high sodium intake can increase the risk of heart disease and stroke — the two biggest killers in America.

Chains have 90 days to comply with the new rule, which was passed unanimously by the city health board in September, before \$200 fines are imposed from March 1.

The sodium law is the latest in a long line of public health measures designed to foster healthier behavior, including a

pioneering ban on smoking that has since been adopted across the world.

It comes as the US departments of agriculture and health and human services, recommend that Americans reduce their daily sodium intake to less than 2.3 grams of sodium a day.

Limit

New York authorities say the average adult in the city consumes almost 40 percent more sodium than the recommended limit per day, with black and Hispanic New Yorkers most affected.

"Too few understand the link between high sodium intake and hypertension, heart disease, and stroke," said Mary Bassett, city health commissioner.

"These icons will help New Yorkers make more informed choices when dining out," she added.

Chains account for one-third of the restaurant clientele in New York, city authorities say.

Applebee's is among those restaurants

who have willingly adopted sodium warnings on menus in the city.

"We want our guests to have as much information as needed to make informed decisions," said Zane Tankel, CEO of Apple-Metro, the company that owns Applebee's restaurants in the city.

A study carried out at the University of Minnesota found the mean sodium content in food served by the eight biggest US restaurant chains rose 23 percent between 1998 and 2010.

"Restaurants — for those of us who want to limit the sodium in our diet — it becomes a difficult place to do that," said Sonia Angell, deputy commissioner for prevention and primary care.

"The vast majority of sodium in our diet doesn't come from what we're adding at the table, it doesn't come from what we add when we're cooking. It's coming from processed and packaged foods."

But the National Restaurant

Association plans to take legal action against what it calls an "overly onerous" regulation as establishments work to comply with federal law demanding calorie data on menus by December 2016.

In 2008, New York became the first US city to force chain restaurants to include calorie counts on menus — which will now become federal law from Dec 1, 2016.

The NRA says it wants uniform, nationwide labeling that gives consumers across the country the same nutritional information.

"While the board of health thinks they are targeting corporate chains, in reality they are dealing yet another blow to many of New York's small businesses," it said in a statement.

The NRA and other groups overturned an attempt by the city two years ago to ban large sugary drinks. Other studies also suggest there is a limited impact in labelling menus.

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- Occupational Health & Industrial Hygiene
- Personal Safety
- Fire Safety
- Environmental Engineering & Management
- Loss Prevention
- Industrial Security
- Behavior Based Safety (BBS)
- Ergonomics
- Journey Management
- An Executive Panel Discussion by CEOs of KNPC, EQUATE, KOC on

Contractor safety will be conducted on the first day after the inauguration. The symposiums will be on Process Safety Management and Sustainable Energy.

An exposition by the industrial supplier and service providers will be organized and everyone can visit their booths during the conference. E-poster exhibition of those who participate in the poster competition will be displayed.

Dec 10

Workshops at Sadu House: Series of special workshops at the Sadu House starting on Dec 10th!

Join us for a series of workshops at the Sadu House with textile artist Ceyda Oskay.

Workshops include: Basic Paint with natural dyes (weekend 2 hour course with kids); printing on fabric or paper (short

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