Traditional Medicine in Union of MYANMAR
Introduction

Myanmar Traditional Medicine has flourished over thousand of years and becomes a distinct entity for which it has to be taken pride. This emerged as a delicate, useful and important subject of community health in preventive, curative and rehabilitative aspects.

Myanmar Traditional Medicine covers basic Myanmar traditional subjects of beliefs, practice, culture, numerous treatises in medicine and different methods on prescribing enormous variety of traditional drugs that are potent and effective. It is now, time to act upon Myanmar traditional medicine to be Good Medical Practice (GMP) through proper standardization and quality assurance.

Good Medical Practice will enhance the role of traditional medicine popularity not only in Myanmar but also in abroad. Therefore government is taking steps to strive traditional medicine for standardize, modern and effective health care facilities in Myanmar. Government has done big capital investment in newly establishment of University of Traditional Medicine at Mandalay, and opening of new traditional medical hospitals and clinics at various parts of Myanmar. Ministry of Health allocates human resources at required and needy places in order to provide better public health care services.
All these well-rounded efforts are encouraged developing traditional medicine with greater momentum, hoping a lot of good results in many areas, as the art of teaching traditional medicine to reach international level, the traditional medicine itself winning greater confidence and reliance of people, a large number of traditional medicines are manufactured through advanced technologies coming out and research work achieving success after success.

**Background History**

Definite commencement of Myanmar Traditional Medicine is unrecognizable because of time immemorial. Traditional Medicine has been existed in Myanmar long long ago. At present day, the image of traditional medicine differs from that of olden day image. Traditional Medicine is always taking vital role in the most essential part of humanity for their survival and longevity. Over the years, traditional medicine has been instrumental in maintaining physical and mental strength of people of Myanmar.

Throughout the course of history of Myanmar civilization countable by the years in thousand, in other words one dynasty after another, traditional medicine is being inherited for five eras; Bagan, Pinya, Inwa, Koungboung and Yadanabon.

It is said to be declinational of traditional medicine in Myanmar during colonical time (1885-1948), it has been under utilized and neglected by authority concerned. Though it was neglected, some patriotic traditional medicine practitioner could maintain their professional domain through health care provision with available resources.

There has been a change for the worse in the health situation of people during world war time because of western drugs scarcity. Therefore people relied on traditional medicine practitioners and their drugs. It made people aware of traditional medicine and inspired effectiveness of such Myanmar traditional medicine for their healthy life and life saving action.

Gradually, community acceptance of traditional medicine has increase day by day, traditional medicine is being utilized wider scale reaching grass-root level. Nowadays, the role of traditional medicine has
become greater than before in health utilization pattern of private sector and public sector. Myanmar system of traditional medicine is based on Buddhist philosophy and Ayurvedic concepts, which originated from Ayurvedic medicine in Indian system of medicine.

Today, basic essential content and specific component fundamental discipline of Myanmar traditional medicine had been identified as the followings:

1. The Desana system
   It is based on natural occurrence such as hot and cold. Its concepts are largely dependent on Buddhist Philosophy, with the therapeutics use of herbal and mineral compounds and diet.

2. The Bethitzza system
   This system is based on Ayurvedic concepts with extensive use of herbal and mineral compounds to establish balance among three dosas namely *Kapha, Vata and Pitta*.

3. The Astrological system
   It is based on the calculations of zodiac of stars, planets and the time of birth and age. These calculations are linked to prescribed dietary practices.

4. The Vezzadara system
   This system is largely dependent on meditation and practices of alchemy. The skill, know-how and techniques of the drug preparations are such that they are drived from heavy metals such as lead, mercury and poisonous substances such as arsenic and its compounds after they are converted into inert ones by means of series of killing processes, in order to obtain supernatural power.

**National Policy on Traditional Medicine**

In Myanmar, Government formed National Health Committee, which is high-level inter-ministerial and policy-making body for health development. The National Health Committee takes the leadership role and gives guidance in implementing the health programme systematically and efficiently. It was stated in National Health Policy that “To reinforce the service and research activities of indigenous medicine to international level and to involve in community health care activities”. 
With the objectives of uplifting the health status of the entire population, the Ministry of Health is systematically developed Health Plan, aiming towards health for all goal. From 1978 onwards four yearly People’s Health Plans have been drawn up and implemented and since 1991 short term national Health Plans have been developed and implemented. Existing health development plans are as follows:

1. Myanmar Health Vision 2030
   30 Year Long-Term Health Plan
   (2001-02 to 2030-31)
2. Special (4 ) Year Plan for Promoting National Education (Health Sector)
   (2000-01 to 2003-04)
3. Rural Health Development Plan
   (2001-02 to 2005-06)
4. Project for Upgrading of Hospitals
   (2001-02 to 2005-06)
5. National Health Plan
   (2001-02 to 2005-06)

**Role of Traditional Medicine in National Health System**

Serial medium term four-year health plans were carried out since 1978. Starting from first four-year people health plan (1978-1981), traditional medicine services have been incorporated into mainstream of health programme. The services keep going on with success stories along the course of people health plan and national health plan.

The community even at grass-root level could enjoy the ample services of traditional medicine through Nation Health System. Services Provision is entirely in line with primary health care approach. It has no discrimination
against religious, ethnic diversity, poverty, wealth, educate or non-educated people. Equity is true and obviously seen in traditional medicinal services.

Currently, state and division, there have been (14) traditional medicine hospitals, (43) district traditional medicine clinic and (194) township traditional medicine clinics, existing up to border area.

During the establishment of such infrastructure, hospital and clinic, community participation and their donation in term of materials, facilities contributions are quite recognizable.

People have right to choose according to their preference whether western medicine or traditional medicine. Also there are to and from referral system both traditional medicine practitioners and western medical doctors. Special interests are also taken into combine treatment re-given by allopathic and traditional medicine for some diseases through research activities. Traditional medical service is not confined to treatment sector alone, it extends to health education and health promotion activities, and also conducting research.

Since, all these activities are still going on with momentum, traditional medicine becomes more and more integral part and vital role of National Health System of Myanmar.

**Establishment of Department of Traditional Medicine**

In 1953, Traditional Medicine promotion office was established under Department of Health. Then in 1989, Department of Traditional Medicine was established as a separate Department under Ministry of Health. The objectives of the Department are as follows:

1. To provide entire nation by comprehensive traditional medicine services through existing health care system in line with National Health Plan.

2. To develop standardized method of therapeutic criteria systematically.

3. To review and find out ways and means for newly developed therapeutic agents and medicine, which are safe and efficacious.

4. To produce fully quality Traditional Medicine Practitioners to be utilized in health service provision by means of skill based and participatory approach training.
Traditional Medicine Health Care Delivery System

In Myanmar, provision of health care by traditional medicine is well established and covered central to peripheral level. In central level, Department of Traditional Medicine takes responsible for the management of traditional medicine health care delivery system. In intermediate level, (14) State and Division traditional medicine departments manage prevention and curative programme. In district level, (43) district traditional medicine clinics provide treatment and participating in prevention programme. In peripheral level, (194) township clinics provide treatment and participating in prevention programme.

The flow of health care delivery system by traditional medicine is as mentioned below:

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Department of Traditional Medicine  ↓  Central
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State and Division Traditional Medicine Department  ↓  Intermediate
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District Traditional Medicine Department  ↓  District
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Township Traditional Medicine Department  ↓  Peripheral
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Human Resource Development of Traditional Medicine

Human resource development of traditional medicine is major concern for every personnel who take responsibility and traditional medical service. The responsible person realized that effectiveness and continuity of services are impossible without properly trained practitioners. The traditional medicine practitioner who has conceptual orientation to traditional medicine and technical competency will only be able to carry over such medical profession from one generation to another.

Institute of Traditional Medicine

One traditional medical institute has been developed since 1976. It produces 100 candidates yearly. They received diploma after three year course. Up to 2008-2009 academic year, the number of students awarded diploma totaled (2187). One (50) bedded hospital is attached to the institute for clinical practice of traditional medicine.

University of Traditional Medicine

Two and half decade later, after establishment of Traditional Medical Institute, University of Traditional Medicine has emerged in year 2001. The University is going to produce (250) candidates yearly. This man-power production will fulfill the requirement of traditional medicine practitioner in terms of quality as well as quantity. It has planned to produce traditional medicine practitioners with different caliber and different
capability from previous diploma holder. The students have to attend four-year academic course and additional one-year course for clinical practice to get skill based competency. At the completion of eligible candidates are to be conferred Bachelor of Myanmar Traditional Medicine (BM, TM) degree. After that, they are going to be posted in Government services.

Curriculum for University of Traditional Medicine

New appropriate curriculum for University of traditional medicine has been prepared. However, content for University curriculum is based on that of traditional medical institute, it has been several times reviewed and revised to improve, relevant and appropriate for University status.

Teaching Method and Educational Approach

Since year 2001 in 19 December, University of Traditional Medicine has started academic teachings through conventional lecture, method, small group discussion and demonstrations, computer lab and multimedia class, role-play, etc.

The University of Traditional Medicine always emphasizes on excellent teachings, which required some critical elements such as,

(a) Knowledge of subject matter concerning with four types of NAYA and other supportive subjects (Language, Basic Science and Basic Medical Science)
(b) Availability of staff member not only teaching staff, administrative and experienced herbal gardeners who can explain about herbal medicinal plants in detail.

(c) Organization of subjects for parallel teaching and organization of teachers for optimistic concept - to overcome confounding factors resultant by diversity of subject nature, basic science approach to eastern philosophical ways of thinking and partial integration of western medicine to traditional medicine.

(d) Encouragement of student discussion and feedback, which definitely enhance student’s ability to improve knowledge, skill and attitude toward traditional medicine practice.

(e) Appropriate assessment of student for their terminal competency through written, practical and viva voce in regular basis.

Subjects Teach in BMTM Course

Major Categories of Subjects

1. Traditional Medicine
   1.1 (4) principle of NAYA
      Panchakama, Pharmacology, Nutrition and diet,
      Therapeutic technique of Massage

2. Supportive Subjects
   2.1 Language
      Myanmar, English, Pali, Sanskrit
   2.2 Basic Science
      Physics, Chemistry, Botany, Zoology, Behavioral Science,
      Computer Study, Phyto-Chemistry, Pharmacognosy
   2.3 Basic Medical Science
      Anatomy, Physiology, Pathology, Microbiology, Biochemistry,
      Clinical Method, Forensic Medicine, Preventive and social medicine

Level Objectives

At the completion, eligible candidates are to be conferred Bachelor of Myanmar Traditional Medicine (B.M.T.M.) degree.
Traditional Medicine Council Law

The Myanmar Indigenous Medicine Act was enacted in 1953. According to the act, the State Traditional Medical Council was formed which is a leading body and responsible for all the matters relating to traditional medicine. To keep abreast with the changing circumstances, the department reviewed and updated the Myanmar Indigenous Medicine Act transformed to Myanmar Traditional Medicine Council Law, which was enacted in the year 2000. One of the objectives of the Law is that “To supervise traditional medicine practitioners for causing abidance by the rule of conduct and discipline”. At present, there are over six thousand traditional medicine practitioners registered under the said law. According to the law, the license for practicing are issued to the persons who have diploma in traditional medicine or Bachelor of Myanmar Traditional Medicine. To enhance above-mentioned Law, special one year course of traditional medicine training is being conducted in order to have organized and legitimate practitioners who are not academically trained previously. After this course the candidate becomes legal practitioner.

Traditional Medicine Drug Law

In 1996, the Government promulgated the traditional medicine drug law in order to control the production and safety of traditional medicine drug systematically. This was followed by the series of notifications concerning registration and licensing, labeling and advertising. One of the objectives of Drug Law is “To enable the public to consume genuine quality, safe and efficacious traditional drugs”.

According to the traditional medicine drug law, all the traditional medicine drugs produced in the country have to be registered and the manufacturers must have licenses to produce their products. This has been done since 1996 after the promulgation of the said law. There are altogether (10518) registered items of drugs and (1985) manufacturers have already got the licenses for production. Practices of Good Manufacturing are considered before given the licenses. In addition, the department also involves in the control of advertisement of these drugs.
Research

In Myanmar, the Research unit was established under Department of Traditional Medicine with the aim of research on authenticity, safety, efficacy, toxicity and quality of traditional medicine. Moreover, according to the guideline laid down by Head of the Status, the Ministry of Health established Department of Medical Research (Upper Myanmar) and Department of Medical Research (Middle Myanmar) to implement the research activities for new traditional medicine, especially for six common diseases namely Diarrhea, Dysentery, Malaria, Tuberculosis, Hypertension and Diabetes.

Cultivation of Medicinal Herbs and Maintenance of Herbal Gardens

With the main aim to produce enough raw materials for the department own drug factories, the Department of Traditional Medicine has established one garden after another for the cultivation of medicinal herbs. Hence there are now altogether (9) gardens with a total acreage of over (120) acres. Since herbal gardening is still in its infancy, only 20% of the area has been utilized at the present moment.

Traditional Medicine Practitioners Conference and Traditional Medicine Drugs Exhibition

With the main aim to upgrade the role of traditional medicine and to improve the unity of Traditional Medicine practitioners, the Traditional Medicine practitioners conference is held every year followed by Traditional Medicine Drugs Exhibition, which is aimed to improve the quality of Myanmar Traditional Medicine.