

SAMHS INFO BULLETIN

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African Traditional Medicine Week: 26-31 August 2013

Each year, since 2003, the African Region commemorates on 31 August the African Traditional Medicine Day. The theme for this year's 10th edition is **African Traditional Medicine Day: What Impact?**

The significance of African Traditional Medicine Day is to raise awareness of the critical role that traditional medicine plays in improving people's health. In recognition of its role in health development in Africa, Heads of State and Government at their Summit in Maputo (Mozambique) in 2003 endorsed the institution of the African Traditional Medicine Day for Advocacy since about 80% of the African populations use it for their health care needs.

The institution of African Traditional Medicine Day, coupled with continuous support of WHO, has impacted positively on practitioners, practices and products, hence contributing to improving access to medicines in the African Region.

In some cases traditional medicine is the only healthcare service available, accessible and affordable to many people on the continent. In this case the significant contribution of traditional medicine as a major provider of healthcare services in Africa cannot be underestimated.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has called on African governments to create conditions necessary for the use of traditional medicine to thrive on the continent. WHO's African Regional Director said in a statement that since 80 percent of Africans use traditional medicine for their healthcare needs, it is important for governments to promote its rational use and integration into their national health systems.

Nothing that traditional medicine should be accorded with the status and respect it deserved, he stressed the need for mutual respect and closer collaboration between modern and traditional health practitioners. He pledged the WHO support to countries in ensuring the affordability and wide availability of traditional medicines, adding that the organisation is providing guidance for the evaluation of medicines for the treatment of other conditions that included diabetes and hypertension.

The South African government is working towards establishing a national institute of African traditional medicine to coordinate, undertake and provide leadership in research. It also proposes that the institute be responsible for ensuring the safety, quality and timely availability of medicines and raw materials.

It must be noted that in African cultures, the act of healing is considered as a religion act. Therefore, the healing process often attempts to appeal to God, because it is ultimately God who provides a cure in many ways. The role of traditional medicine will therefore play a biggest role as more and more medicines are declared safe and good quality in the very near future.

Approved by:

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