

## RESEARCH IN INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE : OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

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Integrative Medicine (IM) refers to a healthcare system that is prospective and holistic, while patient centered and personalized at the same time, focusing on health and wellbeing of the people in addition to disease management. It is not to be equated with Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) or the spectrum of Traditional Systems of Medicine. Integrative medicine researchers have broadly adopted the paradigm of evidence based medicine (EBM) which includes randomized controlled clinical trials (RCT).

Conducting IM research continues to be challenging for the IM researchers (i) in areas of evaluating IM using existing models of scientific research, (ii) difficulty in obtaining the required proportion of grants for in-depth studies, (iii) to find internationally acclaimed journals to accept IM research outputs and (iv) the legal challenges in the practice of IM in medical institutions and hospitals.

Despite all of these challenges, there have been many research teams at major universities in the world, who have made significant inroads into delineating the science of IM using traditional RCT study designs. For example, Taichi's effectiveness in treating headache; "Whole Systems Research (WSR)" in Ayurveda or Chinese medicine and "Health Services Research (HSR)" to demonstrate the validity of alternative forms of research in CAM/IM.

A similar attempt successfully made by our group for a period spanning over 25 years to validate the use of a medicinal plant, *Phyllanthus amarus*-based drug for the treatment of chronic carriers of Hepatitis B which finally received patents and international acclaim would be included in the presentation.

Thus, in order to systematize successful conduct of research in Integrative Medicine, the following strategies would be of great value:

1. Identify the prime areas of research in integrative medicine and define the level of evidence required for their clinical applications.
2. Establish a consortium of integrative medicine researchers to form consensus on how to implement the research priorities.
3. Build an international information technology platform which standardizes and facilitates data acquisition, data banking, and communication between researchers to achieve synergy of productivity.
4. Demonstrate the value of integrative medicine in health maintenance and disease prevention to policy making bodies including legal bodies, especially in light of the current economic setting of burdening health care cost to society, so that more resources can be allocated to integrative medicine research.

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