

## ORIGINAL PAPER

# Homeopathy and complementary medicine in Tuscany, Italy: integration in the public health system

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**The healthcare programmes of the Region of Tuscany, Italy have contained references to various types of non-conventional medicine since 1996, and the last three Regional Health Plans have included a chapter on non-conventional medicine that arguably represent the greatest degree of integration of such therapies in the public health care system achieved thus far in Italy. The Plan aims to guarantee definitive integration in the Regional Health Service of types of non-conventional medicine which are supported by a sufficient level of scientific evidence to allow them to be defined as forms of complementary medicine (acupuncture, herbal medicine, homeopathy and manual medicine). Moreover, in 2007 the Regional council of Tuscany, for the first time in Italy, approved a regional law disciplining the practice of complementary medicines on the part of doctors, dentists, Veterinarians and pharmacists. *Homeopathy* (2008) 97, 70–75.**

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## Introduction

The healthcare programmes of the Region of Tuscany, Italy have contained references to various types of non-conventional medicine since 1996, and the last three Regional Health Plans have included a chapter on non-conventional medicine that arguably represents the greatest degree of integration of such therapies in the public healthcare system achieved thus far in Italy. The Plan aims to guarantee definitive integration in the Regional Health Service of types of non-conventional medicine which are supported by a sufficient level of scientific evidence to allow them to be defined as forms of complementary medicine (acupuncture, herbal medicine, homeopathy and manual medicine).

For these therapies, the following is envisaged: introduction in the regional Essential Assistance Levels scheme with

designated tariffs; approval of a regional law disciplining the practice of these therapies with the establishment of a professional register; inclusion of representatives in the Regional Health Council working parties; the introduction in the regional guidelines once these forms of medicine are recognised as effective complementary therapies or as an acceptable alternative when specifically indicated; the promotion of awareness of these types of complementary medicine on healthcare degree courses; the carrying out of other activities to achieve complete integration in the Regional Health Service.

This has been achieved on the basis of regional programming measures developed over the past few years several public clinics offering non-conventional medicine services have been set up and expanded in Tuscan hospitals (there are currently over 60); a study of non-conventional medicine in Tuscany and a survey of the scientific and legislative documentation on the subject have both been carried out thanks to the Regional Health Agency; numerous studies and/or research projects on non-conventional medicine have been financed. The availability of acupuncture and moxibustion is guaranteed by the Regional Health Service as well as other types of non-conventional medicine in existing projects;

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the establishment of Regional Reference Centres for acupuncture and Chinese medicine, herbal medicine and homeopathy; numerous courses, seminars and conferences have taken place; and a regional publication on non-conventional medicine is published and a section is included on the official Regional Health Service website.

In February 2007 the Regional Council of Tuscany approved the law regulating the practice of complementary medicine by doctors, dentists, veterinarians and pharmacists. The experience of integrating non-conventional medicine in Tuscany's healthcare programmes is an important reference point on a national level, it has also achieved user satisfaction and been generally well-received. It has also helped to establish a positive relationship with the associations and scientific societies of the sector and gained the appreciation of the region's medical and academic circles.

### The process of integration 1996–2005

The Region sponsored an initial conference on complementary medicine in Florence in December 1997 with the objective of encouraging governmental institutions to reflect on the diffusion of such therapies and of providing constructive answers. In particular it was hoped that programmes might be defined enabling the possibilities provided by the 1996–1998 Regional Plan<sup>1</sup> to be transformed into initiatives and activities. The National Health Minister at the time, Rosy Bindi, attended the conference underlining its status as the most advanced such project in the country; and Claudio Martini, then Regional Councillor of Health, now Governor of Tuscany, demonstrated the political will to promote and sustain the integration of non-conventional medicine in public structures.

The 1996–1998 Regional Health Plan contained directives addressing the development of non-conventional medicine and an invitation to look more closely: “*at the overall practices of natural medicine... and to promote a culture of health based on a reduction in pharmacological consumption*”.<sup>1,2</sup> Martini requested Local Health Authorities intending to provide complementary medicine to give notice of this, indicating the services provided, the means of access and the resources destined for these projects.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently public sector homeopathic clinics have also been set up for the first time. The Tuscan government also financed projects supporting the development of natural and homeopathic medicine in the southern countries of the world.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1999–2001 Regional Health Plan<sup>5</sup> there was, for the first time, a section dedicated to complementary medicine. A Regional Committee, made up of experts from the various disciplines, was established with the task of identifying the strategies necessary to achieve integration of complementary therapies, including veterinary practice. The other objectives were: to identify the instruments to assess the demand present in the region; to enumerate the most important activities; to evaluate study and research proposals for the sector and proposals for human experimentation; to define, in conjunction with the Order of Doctors and Universities, the accreditation criteria for professional training; to promote initiatives aimed

to establish registers for practitioners of complementary medicine and to guarantee indications and availability of these therapeutic services to citizens.

One of the Committee's first decisions was a survey<sup>6</sup> to assess the demand for non-conventional medicine in Tuscany, scientific and legislative documentations, the existence of activities relative to acupuncture, traditional Chinese medicine, homeopathy and phytotherapy within the public structures of the Health Service in Tuscany and support for courses for public sector healthcare service workers. As part of this project, a survey was conducted on the opinions of family doctors and paediatricians in Tuscany in 2003.<sup>7</sup> Of the 2228 responding doctors and paediatricians (of approximately 3500 in total) 15.2% practised non-conventional medicine, 57.8% recommend them to their own patients, 11% have specific training, while 29.2% would like to have training in non-conventional medicine. 65.7% were in favour of teaching non-conventional medicine at university and 23.7% have used non-conventional medicine to treat their own ailments, compared to the average of 20% for all Tuscan citizens.

In the summer of 2001 a resolution was approved<sup>8</sup> allocating funds to support research in the non-conventional medicine sector. Public and private bodies and associations based in Tuscany could present study and research proposals, with the aim of evaluating the effectiveness of non-conventional therapies that seemed of greater interest, for example, acupuncture, Chinese medicine, homeopathy, homotoxicology, phytotherapy, manipulative medicine and arts for health, for specific pathologies for both humans and animals. Twenty such plans were financed with a total budget of approximately €380,000. The proposals concerned acupuncture (7), homeopathy (5), phytotherapy (2), Qi-Qong, Tai-chi (2) and Tibetan medicine (1). The remaining projects are concerning manipulative therapies, in particular osteopathy.

The Regional Health Plan for 2002–2004<sup>9</sup> included the measure ‘Non-conventional medicine’. This introduced a more organic and structural implementation phase, with outlines for general medicine doctors on the use of non-conventional therapies, and moving towards guidelines for training of health workers, in collaboration with the Federation of the Orders of Doctors in Tuscany. The process of integration outlined so far has received active contributions and often collaboration of important regional healthcare institutions, such as the Medical Association and the University of Florence. Advanced training courses and masters degree on complementary medicine have been running since 2005 with the collaboration of Regional Reference Centres: the Faculty of Pharmacy at the University of Florence runs an advanced training course in Chinese Phytotherapy (Director: Prof F Vincieri). The Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of the University of Florence has created a Masters course entitled ‘Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine’ (Director Prof GF Gensini). The Masters in ‘Clinical Phytotherapy’ ran for the first time in February 2007 and was organised by the Faculty of Medicine and

Surgery of the University of Florence and by the Polo Universitario of Empoli (Coordinator Prof GF Gensini).

The Region of Tuscany has collaborated with FP Lucchese MP, the proposer of the bill for an Italian national law for regulations concerning non-conventional medicine and practices.<sup>10</sup> The next important step is the creation of a Hospital of Integrative Medicine. This will be in southern area of Tuscany (Maremma), an area internationally known for its thermal baths. To study the feasibility of that project a regional delegation from Tuscany has visited the Royal London Homeopathic Hospital (RLHH) in February 2007. The first congress aimed at discussing the project among the parties concerned (Region, Municipalities, Universities, experts in CAM) took place in May.

## Regional reference centres

Regional Resolution no. 1384, approved in December 2002, established the "Regional Reference Structure for Complementary Medicine", consisting of three centres: Acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine Clinic "Fior di Prugna" in Florence, which is also coordinating centre for complementary medicine in the region; the Phytotherapy Clinic of S. Giuseppe Hospital, Empoli, and the Homeopathic Clinic of Campo di Marte Hospital, Lucca.

The latter was founded in September 1998. By December 2006, 1730 patients were seen for a total of 4367 visits.<sup>11</sup> The most frequently presented pathologies were as follows: respiratory problems 26.8%, dermatological problems 15.4%, gastro intestinal problems 13.5%, psychological problems 13.4%. Patients (43.5%) are followed from a minimum of 2 to a maximum of 60 months and in 90% of cases followed there was a clinical improvement of symptoms. There were 9 slight adverse reactions which quickly cleared up on suspension of treatment (2.68%), monitored on 335 consecutive check-up visits effected from the period of June 2003 to June 2004.<sup>12</sup> An evaluation of cost-benefits of homeopathy demonstrated a reduction in the consumption of conventional medicine of about 46%.<sup>13</sup> A gynaecological homeopathic clinic has been active since 2002, and a telephone information service since 2003, providing information on homeopathy and pharmacovigilance. In addition to clinical activity, the Lucca Clinic disseminates information to the public; trains healthcare workers, with accredited CME courses; conducts research projects on issues such as adverse reactions to and the cost-benefits of, homeopathy; and international cooperation activity in support of projects for the development of natural medicine in the southern countries of the world.

## Complementary medicine in the new Regional Health Plan 2005–2007

The latest Regional Health Plan<sup>14</sup> aims to guarantee the definitive integration of forms of non-conventional medicine supported by sufficient scientific evidence to be defined as complementary medicine: acupuncture, phytotherapy, homeopathy and manual medicine. These will be: intro-

duced into the regional essential levels of assistance with designated tariffs; a regional directive will discipline the practice and establish of professional orders or registers held by the professional orders; be represented in the Regional Health Council's working group. Regional guidelines for these types of medicine will be introduced when they have been recognised as efficient replacement, complementary or acceptable alternative therapies for specific indications; information regarding these types of medicine in degree programmes in the healthcare sector will be promoted. An annual fund of €600,000 was allocated for the 3-year period.

The first measure to significantly change reality in terms of clinical government is Regional Law No. 40<sup>15</sup> on the reform of Local Health Authorities, which envisages the existence of a representative of complementary medicine in each Tuscan Health Authority and a representative in the Regional Health Council and the Regional Bioethics Council.

## Regional information regarding complementary medicine

The Region of Tuscany set the objective of spreading information uniformly across the region with an information campaign on complementary medicine, which began in autumn 2005. The campaign, involved press releases in the main regional and national newspapers with regional pages, posters displayed on billboards and public transport vehicles. Three types of complementary medicine – homeopathy, acupuncture and phytotherapy – were central to the initiative. One pathology was emphasised for each therapeutic system, selected on the basis of documentation on the effectiveness available in the literature and use in the population. Allergies were the pathology for homeopathy (see photo below).

The Health Inspectorate intended to propose a model of sustainability of the systems of healthcare, prevention, health promotion and cure, supporting participation in several exhibitions including of Terra Futura in Florence in April 2006, at which regional initiatives were clarified at a conference: *Complementary Medicine and Bio-Natural Disciplines in Regional Politics. Compared Experiences for a Common Future*. Christopher Smallwood, author of 'The Role of Complementary and Alternative Medicine in the NHS', commissioned by HRH the Prince of Wales attended this conference. Representatives of the health councils of 10 Italian regions participated in a round table discussion, and coordination between the regions concerned was initiated. The coordination process between regions is at an advanced stage at the Health Committee of the State-Regions Conference; and an interregional table coordinated by Tuscany on this subject is now active, in which the Minister of Health and national organisations are due to participate.

## Complementary medicine available in specialist clinics

An important recent measure, due to the fact that it fills a void in national legislation, is the signing of the

**Against allergy now you can choose.  
Also homeopathy, if you want.**



**Contro l'allergia ora puoi scegliere.  
Anche l'omeopatia, se vuoi.**

Il presente regolamento, approvato dalla Regione Toscana, disciplina l'attività delle strutture sanitarie pubbliche e private che, in attuazione dell'articolo 10 della Legge Regionale n. 10 del 2007, forniscono servizi di medicina complementare e omeopatia. Il regolamento è in vigore dal 1° gennaio 2008. Per informazioni, consultare il sito internet della Regione Toscana: [www.regione.toscana.it](http://www.regione.toscana.it)

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Tuscan Regional Integrative Agreement for specialist clinics including complementary medicine.<sup>16</sup> This standardises contractual arrangements, which are currently extremely diverse, to safeguard the professionalism of workers and guarantee a suitable procedure for health agencies wishing to introduce these services to their structures. The Regional Agreement provides for the *obligatory* referral of all relations currently in force between practitioners of complementary medicine and Regional Healthcare Agencies to the economic and regulatory discipline outlined in the National Agreement. For the moment it applies exclusively to doctors holding a specialist diploma in the disciplines. This agreement represents Italy's first real attempt to define a procedure for health agencies to proceed with the opening of public complementary medicine services, safeguard the user and assess practitioners' professional experience.

## The regional law for conventional medicine regulations

In February 2007 the Regional Council of Tuscany approved the law disciplining the practice of complementary medicine on the part of doctors, dentists,

veterinarians and pharmacists.<sup>17</sup> This law was subsequently contested by the National Government who deemed that its contents were not the responsibility of the Regions but of the State; some articles were then modified and the law was definitively passed on 16 May 2007.<sup>18</sup> The provision concerns types of complementary medicine already included in the essential levels of assistance of the 2005–2007 Regional Health Plan and recently included in the regional applicative agreement of the National Agreement on Medical Specialists for acupuncture, phytotherapy and homeopathy.

The Regional Law essentially requires that the orders of doctors, dentists, veterinarians and pharmacists draw up lists of the professionals who practice complementary medicine on the basis of qualifications and experience to be defined by the appropriate Regional Committee for complementary medicine training who will issue the certification. The Regional Committee is made up of representatives of the Directorate-General of Health, representatives of the professional orders and the associations of acupuncture, phytotherapy and homeopathy of the Universities in Tuscany (Florence, Pisa and Siena), directors of regional reference centres for complementary medicine and experts appointed by the Regional Health Council. The committee's duties are to define the criteria for admission to the list of health professionals practising complementary medicine and the accreditation criteria for public and private Establishments for training in the disciplines of complementary medicine.

## International cooperation supporting homeopathy and complementary medicine

Programmes of international cooperation have been active for several years supporting the development of natural medicine in the southern countries of the world. Decentralised cooperation programmes have been set up in Cuba, Senegal, Serbia and in the Sahara with the Saharawi people in conjunction with local bodies, international organisations, civil society associations and non-governmental organisations.

A project for the 'Development of Natural and Homeopathic Medicine in Cuba' has been operating since 1995, beginning in Santiago de Cuba, in 1996/97, the project became a 'Decentralised Cooperation Project' of the Municipality of Viareggio (Lucca - Italy) in the area of Guantanamo, within the emergency water sanitation programme promoted by the OPS/WHO (Organización Panamericana de Salud/World Health Organisation) of Cuba. A similar project was approved by the Region of Tuscany in 1997 to support the establishment of a clinic for natural and homeopathic medicine in the '10 de Octubre' Hospital (Cerro, Central Havana). Then, in 1998/99 another project was started up by Tuscany and the Municipality of Viareggio in the Province of Pinar del Rio, linked to the Local Human Development Program managed by United Nations.

The support of the development of natural and homeopathic medicine is fully provided for in the general program of UNOPS/UNDP (United Nations Organisations) of Cuba, dealing with the re-establishment and strengthening of Natural and Traditional Medicine Clinic of Habana Vieja, with a homeopathic service, laboratory and pharmacy. A 3-year project supported by the European Union to build a pharmacological laboratory for the domestic production of homeopathic remedies in Cuba was completed in 2002. The results of this international cooperation have been evaluated as highly satisfying by the Italian and Cuban health authorities and by the U.N. and W.H.O. They offer a solution to continually increasing pharmacological expenses and health costs, which are unaffordable for developing countries.

In June 2005 the Region Reference Centres for Non-Conventional Medicine in the Region of Tuscany conducted a mission to Serbia as part of the IDEASS project (Innovation for development and south-south cooperation) supported by the International Cooperation Programme UNDP/APPI as part of the City to city programme of the United Nations UNDP/UNOPS Agencies. The mission's objective was to introduce the use of moxibustion in the cases of breech presentation of the foetus to prevent births by caesarean section; proposals for projects regarding the support for the development and integration of homeopathic medicine were also set up.

The Lucca Homeopathic Clinic also supports the DEMHOS project in Western Sahara (Desarrollo de la Medicina Natural y Homeopática con el Pueblo Saharawi – Development of Natural and Homeopathic Medicine with the Town of Saharawi) offering a homeopathic approach alongside the Department of Veterinary Science in refugee camps.<sup>19</sup> As part of the Animal Health project, a training programme in homeopathic medicine has started for technicians and veterinarians of the Saharawi Department of Veterinary Science, supported by Associazione Raphael (Study and Research Centre for Natural Medicine) located in Pontasseri (Pisa). Homeopathy does seem to represent a genuinely sustainable medicine offering many advantages, from cultural, therapeutic and economic, to environmental and social.

## Conclusion

Tuscany's case is not isolated in Italy, although the same level of integration has not been achieved elsewhere. There are at least 140 complementary medicine centres open to the public in Italy, offering acupuncture most frequently, then homeopathy and phytotherapy, but also manual medicine. This decentralised movement requires a high level of collaboration and coordination because proposals drawn up on a local level also reach a national level.

Since April 2005, a number of meetings have been held between representatives of Italian regions to build a framework for the coordination of complementary medicine initiatives. The meetings underlined how – in the absence of national regulations – the Regions do not act uniformly and stressed the importance of promoting actions that lead to harmonisation of decisions and behaviour. To this end, the proposal to estab-

lish a permanent place for discussion and exchange of experiences was considered to be a priority, beginning with the most widespread forms of complementary medicine which have greater scientific proof and which are confined to medical practice, in particular acupuncture, phytotherapy and homeopathy. With this objective the Health Committee of the National and Regional Conference set up an interregional forum in February 2007 on the theme of Non-Conventional and Complementary Medicine. Until the Italian parliament legislates, the Regions will be the main actors in the process of recognition of Complementary Medicine in Italy.

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