

Care at the Intersection of Biomedicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine: Narratives of Integration, Negotiation, and Provision

Authors : Jessica Ding

Abstract : The field of global health is currently advocating for a resurgence in the use of traditional medicines to improve people-centered care. Healthcare policies are rapidly changing in response; in China, the increasing presence of TCM in the same spaces as biomedicine has led to a new term: integrative medicine. However, the existence of TCM as a part of integrative medicine creates a pressing paradoxical tension where TCM is both seen as a marginalized system within 'modern' hospitals and as a modality worth integrating. Additionally, the impact of such shifts has not been fully explored: the World Health Organization for one focuses only on three angles —practices, products, and practitioners— with regards to traditional medicines. Through ten weeks of fieldwork conducted at an urban hospital in Shanghai, China, this research expands the perspective of existing strategies by looking at integrative care through a fourth lens: patients and families. The understanding of self-care, health-seeking behavior, and non-professional caregiving structures are critical to grasping the significance of traditional medicine for people-centered care. Indeed, those individual and informal health care expectations align with the very spaces and needs that traditional medicine has filled before such ideas of integration. It specifically looks at this issue via three processes that operationalize experiences of care: (1) how aspects of TCM are valued within integrative medicine, (2) how negotiations of care occur between patients and doctors, and (3) how 'good quality' caregiving presents in integrative clinical spaces. This research hopes to lend insight into how culturally embedded traditions, bureaucratic and institutional rationalities, and social patterns of health-seeking behavior influence care to shape illness experiences at the intersection of two medical modalities. This analysis of patients' clinical and illness experiences serves to enrich the narratives of integrative medical care's ability to provide patient-centered care to determine how international policies are realized at the individual level. This anthropological study of the integration of Traditional Chinese medicine in local contexts can reveal the extent to which global strategies, as promoted by the WHO and the Chinese government actually align with the expectations and perspectives of patients receiving care. Ultimately, this ethnographic analysis of a local Chinese context hopes to inform global policies regarding the future use and integration of traditional medicines.

Keywords : emergent systems, global health, integrative medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, TCM

Conference Title : ICHCA 2020 : International Conference on Historical and Cultural Anthropology

Conference Location : Boston, United States

Conference Dates : April 23-24, 2020