

INVITED COMMENTARY

The Berlin Agreement: Self-Responsibility and Social Action in Practicing and Fostering Integrative Medicine and Health Globally

Organizing Committee, World Congress on Integrative Medicine and Health*

Editor's Note: At the end of this document is a list of individuals who led the creation of the agreement and of the initiative organizations to have subsequently endorsed it. If an organization with which you are involved may be interested in being listed among those endorsing, please engage your organization's appropriate process and, on gaining approval, send a brief note that briefly describes your organization, then state your support to Margit Cree at (margit.cree@charite.de). Thank you for your interest. — John Weeks, Editor-in-Chief, *JACM*.

Introduction

FACED BY MULTIPLE CHALLENGES, including the rise of chronic, lifestyle-related diseases, and grossly inequitable access to healthcare, we are committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 to foster healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages. We are part of a global movement to orient care, and the education, research, and policy that support it, toward a model that draws on biomedical, complementary, and traditional medicine practices and respects multiple philosophies. This approach to medicine and healthcare:

“... reaffirms the importance of the relationship between practitioner and patient, focuses on the whole person, is informed by evidence, and makes use of all appropriate therapeutic and lifestyle approaches, healthcare professionals and disciplines to achieve optimal health and healing.”¹

Our work stands on that advanced in 1978 at the Alma-Ata Conference that mobilized a movement for primary healthcare for all and officially declared the importance of integration of effective traditional practices to promote global health. Today, the World Health Organization (WHO) advocates universal health coverage and integration of safe and effective traditional providers and complementary services into health service delivery, as well as self-care practices. These are key objectives of the WHO's traditional medicine strategy 2014–2023. We also affirm our alignment

¹Definition of Integrative Medicine and Health. Academic Consortium for Integrative Medicine and Health (www.imconsortium.org).

with the declarations from Beijing in 2008 and Stuttgart in 2016 and fully support calls on governments and nongovernmental agencies to adopt, support, fund, research, and promote activities that advance evidence-informed integrative care models.

With this Berlin Agreement, we call on ourselves as individuals to engage, to the best of our abilities, in the following.

Model health

Recognizing that our ability to impart and enhance health and well-being is not only performed by a social and professional health practice but is also informed by our own self-care and resilience, we strive to model personal engagement in health-creating practices.

Engage patients

Knowing that the most important strategy for fostering health is to engage patients in better lifestyle choices, we seek to develop our skills to activate patients to be self-responsible, to strengthen their resilience, and become captains of their own healing processes.

In respect of the importance of natural processes as guides for enhancing well-being, we educate and stimulate patient understanding of, and participation in, efforts to protect and sustain the natural environment.

Promote interprofessionalism and team care

Knowing that no single type of practitioner has all the answers that can be useful to a given patient, we individually seek to develop quality relationships with members of other

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*Members of the Organizing Committee, World Congress on Integrative Medicine and Health, are listed under Acknowledgments at the end of the article.

disciplines and professions to guarantee that we can quickly connect patients to the right services from the right practitioners and right professions at the right time.

Aware that such care may be provided through knowledge or practitioners from multiple global healing traditions, we personally commit to continuously broadening our understanding, awareness, and engagement with other fields and resources.

Recognize the importance of traditional medicine in global healthcare

Given that traditional medical products, practices, and practitioners are the main access to healthcare in most regions of the world, we highlight the importance of global investment to systematically develop best practices in these diverse systems that supports their safe and effective use and integration with biomedical practices.

Commit to evidence-informed dialogue and practice

Aware that a substantial portion of what is done in medicine and healthcare lacks a quality evidence base, we personally seek ever more effective ways to end polarizing dialogue and to stimulate collaboration in our collective ability to research, create, and operationalize optimal evidence-informed integrative care.

Foster whole systems research

Committed to practices that respect the whole human being through use of diverse modalities and often through teams of practitioners, we personally champion development of methods, funding, and dissemination of research that address chronic diseases from multiple etiologies and treatments that often are best resolved through whole person and whole systems approaches.

Aware that questions related to cost are often an obstacle to the system-wide implementation of these models and thus access to these services, we will personally endeavor to support heightened focus on research that includes the economic dimensions of integrative models of care.

Stimulate collaboration

Given the limitations and harm that can emanate for professions and stakeholders operating in isolation, we challenge ourselves individually, and within our own professional organizations and institutions, to commit to programs and projects that stimulate increased respect, collaboration, and understanding across disciplines, traditions, professions, and stakeholders.

Bridge clinical care with prevention, community, and public health

Knowing that clinical medical interventions represent but 10%–20% of the factors that shape the health of a community, we actively engage in creative methods to deepen

the preventive and lifestyle dimensions of our individual practices while also connecting our practices and patients to community and public health resources.

Engage as change agents

Recognizing that imbalances in social, environmental, economic, and political structures are major influences in the health of citizens, we seek to foster more equitable communities and societies.

To better empower our own work, we seek to expand our abilities to work closer and more constructively with other professions, government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, private and not-for-profit businesses, patients, and other stakeholders in advancing integrative health and medicine.

Through engaging these personal and social responsibilities, we will improve individual patient care and positively influence the preconditions of healthcare systems, locally and globally, to achieve optimal health and healing in the individuals, communities, and the planet we serve.

Acknowledgments

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Address correspondence to:
John Weeks
johnweeks-integrator.com
Seattle, WA 98116

E-mail: jweeks.jacm@gmail.com