



Letter to the editor

Regulating traditional medicine from the nursing perspective

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Dear Editor,

Traditional medicine is recognized worldwide as an easily accessible therapeutic alternative with a lower incidence of adverse effects compared to conventional medicine.¹ It is defined as a set of knowledge, practices, and skills from diverse cultures, based on community beliefs and experiences, aimed at promoting health and treating disease.¹

In most Latin American countries, traditional medicine is an essential component of cultural and social heritage. It includes the use of herbs, animal and mineral products, as well as rituals and care by traditional healers, especially in rural areas or among populations with limited access to formal health services.² However, the generational transmission of these practices often lacks scientific support, which can create risks when they are adopted as a substitute for evidence-based medical interventions.³

The limited information available to the population about traditional medicine is a cause for concern.³ The absence of regulatory frameworks to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable people, combined with health decisions based mainly on cultural beliefs rather than scientific evidence, highlights the need to strengthen community education and guidance. Likewise, practices have emerged in so-called neo-rural communities, along with other ethnopractices present at different levels of care, which need to be researched to assess their effects on health and health supervision.³

The World Health Organization (WHO) has promoted significant advances in the regulation of traditional and complementary medicine by expanding its global strategy for integrating these therapies into health systems during the period 2025-2034.⁴ This initiative, analyzed and agreed upon at the 78th World Health Assembly, seeks to ensure that the implementation of traditional and complementary medicine regulations guarantees quality, efficacy, and safety for users, reaffirms the ethical principle of “do not harm” and systematically rejects practices that lack scientific support.⁴

In El Salvador, as in other countries in the region, there remains a considerable gap in the regulation of traditional medicine, largely due to the lack of updates to the legal framework. The only current legislation that recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples dates back to 2014.⁵ To date, there is no evidence of recent reforms by regulatory bodies, a fact that emphasizes the need to promote more in-depth research that responds to the current realities of the Salvadoran population.

From a disciplinary perspective in nursing, there is an inescapable ethical duty: to promote practices based on scientific evidence that guide care processes rigorously. The international strategy emphasizes integrating modern science with the ancestral knowledge of each culture and territory.⁴ However, remnants of the magical-religious paradigm, which conceived illness as a supernatural phenomenon and granted medical knowledge an unquestionable character,

can still be identified; these patterns can now also be observed in the appropriation of scientific information.⁶

The practice of nursing, immersed in daily care, seeks to transcend direct intervention through a holistic approach, as proposed by the theories of Florence Nightingale, Martha Rogers, Madeleine Leininger, and Dorothea Orem.^{7,8} These contributions integrate physical, spiritual, and cultural dimensions and promote comprehensive care that considers the person without separating them from their traditional context.⁷

Despite this, the coordination between traditional therapies and conventional practices remains limited, which may be due to the limited inclusion of complementary medicines within current health services. Nursing staff have a responsibility to act as a bridge between scientific knowledge and cultural traditions, ensuring respect, safety, and well-being for those receiving care, while supporting decision-making based on the best available evidence. In this regard, it is imperative that health, academic, and legislative authorities foster an informed dialogue on traditional medicine, promote regulatory frameworks that encourage contextualized research, and strengthen the training of health personnel to ensure a culturally competent approach in every clinical situation.

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