

# Editorial

This is the first issue since national registration of Chinese medicine commenced in Australia in July 2012. We believe that registration symbolises the start of a bright future for this profession down under. The growth of a profession is not unlike that of a child or a plant, requiring love, care and provision of appropriate nutrients and guidance. As practitioners who all love and care about this profession, we need to know what then are the appropriate nutrients and guidance and where do we obtain them from?

For a thriving plant, the nutrients come from the soil and the environment. To ensure a plant is growing well, you have to examine the soil, understand its chemical composition, make good use of it and adjust it when necessary. The 'soil' for Chinese medicine is the health system of Australia. With 'research' and 'evidence' forming large components of the soil that need nurturing. Our choices are: making good use of these parts and adding other nutrients over time to suit the plants; ignoring the soil or even treating it as toxic; or re-potting the soil all together. Any smart gardener would know the first choice is the most realistic and sustainable way.

The problem is that some 'nutrients', i.e. some specific types of research and evidence, have been prepared for biomedicine and may not be appropriate for Chinese medicine. An interview of 42 Chinese medicine practitioners in Australia showed that all of the interviewees relied heavily on textbook information, expert advice and personal experience to make clinical decisions; and none referred to published clinical trials.<sup>1</sup> The results reflect two possible aspects: (1) our practitioners may not appreciate such research and have little understanding of the significance; and (2) existing clinical trials focus too much on proving Chinese medicine being better than the placebo control (efficacy) and little on how to improve clinical practice.

So how do we improve the 'soil' over time? How do we develop research methods that suit the needs of Chinese medicine? Many researchers around the world have been trying to answer this question. 'Qualitative research' can be one solution.

To help our readers understand the use of this research method in Chinese medicine, AJACM devotes the current issue to 'qualitative research'. We are fortunate to have Dr Charlotte

Paterson, a world-renowned qualitative researcher in health, to write the Guest Editorial. She contrasts qualitative research with quantitative research, and illustrates how this method has been used in Chinese medicine to help us make sense of the humanistic aspect and arts in our medicine. She then analyses each of the four papers in this issue, two written by doctoral candidates, one by a Chinese medicine scholar and practitioner and the fourth by a social science scholar and practitioner.

We believe this special issue provides you, our reader, with a fresh view about other ways to study our profession. Through the eyes of patients and practitioners, the key subjects of the four papers, you will discover and re-discover aspects of Chinese medicine you may not know or might have forgotten.

As usual, we continue to bring the world to you by providing research snapshots, book reviews and conference reports.

In this issue, we sadly say goodbye to A/Prof. Caroline Smith, who has decided to focus on her research and leave the Editorial Board. Caroline was a founding Editorial Board member and has been instrumental in the development of this journal. We wish her well in her future endeavours.

We also warmly welcome two new Editorial Board members: Adj. A/Prof. Hong Xu from the Victoria University and Suzanne Cochrane from the University of Western Sydney. Hong has a research and practice focus on Chinese herbal medicine; and Suzanne, who recently completed her doctoral research, has expertise in qualitative research. Both will certainly broaden the scope and bring fresh ideas to our journal.

We hope you enjoy reading this special issue. We certainly enjoyed making it.

**Zhen Zheng**  
**Editor-in-Chief**

## Reference

Ryan JD. The use of evidence in acupuncture clinical practice. *Aust J Acupunct Chin Med* 2006;1:21-4.