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## LIFE HEALTH

# Public safety not taken lightly in TCM



By Melissa Carr, Special to 24 hours  
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Chinese herbalists, TCM practitioners, and TCM doctors follow specific requirements for the protection of the public.

Aside from finding out whether your health professional can effectively treat your health issues, it's also important to make sure that you are being treated safely. The first principle in medicine is to do no harm. Though it does happen, it is not often that cases of risk to safely occur when it comes to acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) because these practices are regulated with mandatory registration and licensing.

The College of Traditional Chinese Medicine Association of British Columbia (CTCMA of BC) is tasked with making sure all registered acupuncturists, Chinese herbalists, TCM practitioners, and TCM doctors follow specific requirements for the protection of the public. When practitioners do not follow protocol and requirements, they are investigated and reprimanded — public safety is not taken lightly.

There are some steps that you can take to make sure that you make the right choices when choosing your TCM health professional.

Ask friends, family, and health professionals if they can recommend anyone that they know. Word of mouth about positive experiences (or negative ones that help you decide which to avoid) is a great way to start.

Once you have a name, go to the CTCMA website ([www.ctcma.bc.ca](http://www.ctcma.bc.ca)) and click on “find a registrant” to make sure that the practitioner is registered and licensed. You can also check the “public notifications” section for any remarks about a particular registrant.

When visiting a new TCM practitioner, there are some basic and important things that you can note. Acupuncturists are required to use sterile, one-time-use needles that come from sealed packages. Used needles must be disposed of in containers that are properly handled as medical waste. Make sure that the clinic appears to be clean and that the practitioner washes his or her hands, or at least uses hand sanitizers, regularly and frequently.

Though acupuncture does use needles, the risk of infection is actually quite low. However, hygienic practices are essential and easy to follow. Published in The American Journal of Medicine in 2000, a systematic review on the safety of acupuncture showed that a “feeling of relaxation” was the most common “side effect” of acupuncture treatment—at 86%—while serious adverse events were found to be rare.

Acupuncture offers safe and effective treatment, so do your research when choosing your health professional and enjoy the relaxation side effect.

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