

SUMMARY

The traditional health care system as it prevails in South Africa is part of African culture and intricately linked with the African world view. It embraces traditional norms and values that have survived to this day. In this sense it is more than a constituent part of medical pluralism which has become a global phenomenon.

The role of the traditional healer is far more extensive than that of the modern medical doctor. He advises on all aspects of life, including physical, psychological, spiritual, moral and legal matters. He shares the client's world view. He understands the significance of ancestral spirits, the belief in supernatural forces and the reality of witches. It is in this context that modern scientific medicine has not been able to replace traditional medicine, and arguably never will.

Traditional medicine is faced with enormous challenges at present. Firstly, the traditional social order is fast disappearing, making way for the state and the individual whose rights as contained in the Bill of Rights of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa may seriously clash with traditional norms. Secondly, especially in an urban environment, the healer may encounter stiff competition from more progressive colleagues and modern physicians. Thirdly, scientific medicine basically regards traditional activities as unscientific, unregulated, often harmful and sometimes fatal. Fourthly, anti-witchcraft legislation hinders the traditional practitioner to deal with witches in the culturally appropriate manner.

Traditional medicine will not go away. It is therefore necessary to find ways and means to see it practised in a safe and competent manner. As healers agitate for official recognition, it will be regarded as their corresponding duty to professionalise the traditional sector, create a traditional medical council and establish a register of *bona fide* healers who possess stipulated qualifications and are subject to rules of conduct and discipline.

The modern and traditional sectors are essentially complementary and should be accommodated within a legal framework of official health care that protects healers

and healed alike. The legal implications of this strategy are discussed in a global as well as regional African context.

Key terms:

Traditional medicine; legal status; global perspectives; traditional medicine in Asia; traditional medicine in Europe and Africa; modern versus traditional medicine; complementary and alternative medicine; traditional medicine and the South African Constitution; traditional healing and witchcraft.