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Research strategies for acupuncture as part of a whole medical system

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A scientific approach towards whole medical systems (WMS) has been evolved during the last decade and is becoming increasingly professional. WMS are complete systems of theory and practice that have evolved independently from or parallel to conventional medicine. Many are traditional medical systems that are practiced by individual cultures throughout the world (e.g., Anthroposophic Medicine, Ayurveda, Homeopathy, Naturopathy and Traditional Chinese Medicine). WMS practices often involve complex interventions (CI), composed of parts that together make the whole intervention, in which the whole is more than the sum of the parts, and, in which the whole can generate the effect of the intervention. Also in conventional medicine there is increasing interest in the development and testing of CI (e.g., community based health promotion). This presentation provides an overview of the current status needs and future perspectives of a professional scientific approach towards WMS. Core WMS and CI feature will be presented. Different WMS share a holistic ontological position, albeit with some differences in specific holistic, ontological positions. Theory building for WMS/CI includes concepts of wholeness, complexity, non-linear dynamic, adaptive network systems, context factors, and systems causality. Clinical research issues include validation of double diagnoses (conventional and WMS), external and model validity, the use of mixed methods, and comparative (cost) effectiveness studying mechanisms of action at the system level. There is a need for the development of a quality control system for individualized diagnostics and treatment. Based on this analysis, a research strategy for acupuncture as part of the WMS of TCM will be presented.

Biography

Erik W Baars (MD, MSc Epidemiology, PhD) is a Senior Researcher Healthcare (Louis Bolk Institute) and a Professor of Anthroposophic Medicine (University of Applied Sciences, Leiden, The Netherlands). His research interests include clinical studies, health promotion, holism-reductionism, integrative medicine, concept and methodology development. He published 205 papers, articles, book chapters and monographs and received the "Excellence in Integrative Medicine Research Award" (category 'clinical research') provided by the European Society of Integrative Medicine for the article 'Patients whose GP knows complementary medicine tend to have lower costs and live longer' in the *European Journal of Health Economics* (Kooreman & Baars, 2011).

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