From regulation to official integration: the progress of cupping therapy in Qatar

Zainab AlMusleh1, 2, Tamer Aboushanan2, 3, * Corresponding to: Tamer Aboushanan, Department of Academic, Tabibi Polyclinic, 860 Oqba Bin Nafie Street, Zone 45, Doha 212100, Qatar. E-mail: tamer.shaban@gmail.com

World Health Organization (WHO) reported that the integration of some traditional medicine practices with national mainstream health system was started since the 1970s [1]. WHO developed and published two strategies regarding traditional and complementary medicine, which were WHO strategy for traditional medicine 2002–2005 and WHO strategy for traditional medicine 2014–2023 [2, 3].

In addition, India and Malaysia as examples integrated traditional and complementary medicine practices into public healthcare centers [1].

Furthermore, WHO reported the importance of integration of traditional and complementary medicine into primary health care services to comply with the needs of patients especially those with chronic diseases and aging population, and to provide important practices that can be used in prevention, treatment, health promotion, palliative care and rehabilitation [1].

In Qatar, healthcare professionals had a positive attitude towards complementary medicine and had a positive interest towards learning more about its practices. Two conducted studies reported that: 97.5% of general medical practitioners and 90% of oncology healthcare providers in Qatar were interested in education in the field of complementary medicine [4, 5].

Cupping therapy is a part of various traditional health systems around the globe such as: traditional Chinese medicine, traditional Korean medicine, traditional Arabic medicine, and Islamic medicine [6]. Cupping therapy (hijama in Arabic) is one of the traditional medicine practices in Arabic and Islamic countries including Qatar which was practiced for thousands of years around the world. Furthermore, cupping therapy is one of the five regulated complementary medicine practices (Acupuncture, Ayurveda, Cupping therapy, Chiropractic, Homeopathy) in Qatar by Ministry of Public Health since 2016 according to the official circular No. 2/2016 [7].

The licensing requirements for cupping practitioners are accredited professional training which include theoretical, practical, and safety training, and previous uninterrupted experience (at least two years) [7].

Revising requirements for cupping therapy licensing was done in 2021 by official issuing of Circular No. (2/2021) which limited licensing to practice cupping therapy to only those practitioners with health or medical background [8].

There are some reported adverse events related to cupping therapy but most of them were mild to moderate [9]. Cupping therapy is a relatively safe therapy if practiced by well-trained professionals [9].

Conducting research in the field of cupping therapy in Qatar was prompted. A study to evaluate the role of integrating cupping therapy in the management of tinnitus and dizziness was published in 2021 [10].

Integration of complementary medicine into primary healthcare for chronic musculoskeletal pain is recommended by clinical guidelines globally [11].

Recently, and to move more steps towards patient-centric healthcare practice, providing safe complementary medicine services, and to comply with the recommendations of World Health Organization towards integration of the safe, and evidence-based complementary and traditional medicine services into primary healthcare services, Qatar through the Primary Health Care Corporation officially integrate cupping therapy into primary healthcare services in a pilot stage [12]. The Cupping therapy service was integrated in Umm-Slal Health Center from February 2023, and the training of Primary Healthcare staff was done to expand the integration of cupping therapy service into other primary healthcare centers in Qatar [12].

Indications and contraindications that explained by Primary Health Care Corporation in Qatar for this program are summarized in Table 1.

The steps of the progress of cupping therapy practice towards integration into primary healthcare services were illustrated in Figure 1.

Finally, Qatar presented an integration model which can be followed by other countries to integrate safe, and evidence-based traditional and complementary medicine practices into national primary healthcare services.

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Table 1 Indications and contraindications of cupping therapy program in Primary Health Care Corporation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indications</th>
<th>Contraindications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonspecific chronic headache</td>
<td>Pregnant women</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refractory migraine</td>
<td>Acute hepatitis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carpal tunnel syndrome (no indication for surgery)</td>
<td>Tuberculosis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Muscle disorders</td>
<td>Heart disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postural dysfunction</td>
<td>Arrhythmia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper back pain</td>
<td>Pacemaker implantation</td>
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<td>Lower back pain</td>
<td>Blood clotting diseases and hemorrhagic diseases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eczema</td>
<td>Use of anticoagulants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>Severe anemia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acne</td>
<td>Kidney failure or other system failure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Advancement of cupping therapy practice in Qatar

Figure 1 Advancement of cupping therapy practice in Qatar

The process of integration, evaluation and raising standards of practice of traditional and complementary medicine in Qatar is continuous to ensure highest standards of practice and safety of patients.

References


Author contribution
Zainab AlMusleh: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. Tamer Aboushanab: Supervision, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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Abbreviations
WHO, World Health Organization.

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