

## Malaysia, Can Traditional Medicine Survive?

In many countries, public health authorities are concerned about the quality, safety and efficacy of drugs used by traditional medical practitioners. In 1992, the Malaysian government introduced the registration of drugs and cosmetics marketed for public use by traditional practitioners. But by mid 1994 the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) feared that registration procedures would destroy the practice of traditional medicine in Malaysia.

### Registration fee

Traditional practitioners import many of the

medicines they use. One importer of medicines from the world famous ayurvedic centre in India, Kottakal Arya Vaidya Sala, Kerala, says it is possible to pay RM80,000-100,000 (RM=Malaysian ringgit) for registration as some practitioners import up to 800 to 1000 types, each registration application costs RM100. Drugs prepared and dispensed directly to patients by individual traditional practitioners, and herbal substances containing naturally occurring substances of plants, animals or minerals prepared by drying, crushing and milling don't have to be registered.

### Western procedures and criteria

Required pharmaceutical data includes scientific evidence for efficacy and safety, and end product testing results, these methods are based on Western standards. CAP says traditional systems are all embracing systems of health care and cannot be evaluated by western (or allopathic) standards. E.g., substances classified as toxic by western standards are not toxic when present in certain traditional medicines as they have undergone a process of detoxification before use,

these medicines have been used for hundreds of years and that in itself is evidence of efficacy. CAP calls for registration to be done by people qualified in traditional systems.

### No official policy on traditional medicine

Registration is meant to be the first step towards recognition and integration of traditional medicine into the health system, but it seems to be going against them, CAP fears that now many traditional practitioners will have to close their practice.

Source: UTUSAN KONSUMER, April 1994, Consumers Association of Penang, 228, Jalan Macalister, 10400 Penang, Malaysia.

Henna is a hair dyeing agent used by women and men for centuries, but the Consumers Association of Penang, CAP, warns that black henna users risk cataracts, blindness and skin inflammation if they use black henna preparations mixed with coal tar dyes. We reprint their warning as many women use henna based hair dyes.

Natural henna cannot blacken hair, it can only give a range of colours from dark brown to various shades of reddish blonde. Black henna dye is thus likely to have chemicals added, natural henna leaves

used as a dye do not. Some black henna brands contain a harmful chemical, para phenylenediamine, which is also present in chemical hair dyes and is a constituent of coal tar dyes, it has been recognised as an irritant. Studies by the Department of Ophthalmology of the Post Graduate Institute at Chandigarh, India, show an abnormally high incidence of cataracts in users of hair dyes containing this chemical.

## BLACK HENNA HAIR DYES - Your crowning glory is a health hazard

### Dangers of chemical hair dyes

How many of us read warning signs on labels? But the label on one brand of black henna dye, Black Rose [made in India], warns that preparations containing this chemical 'may cause serious inflammation of the skin in some cases. This preparation should on no account be used for dyeing eyebrows or eyelashes as severe inflammation of the eye or even blindness may result'.

CAP advises consumers to stop using all chemical hair dyes as studies show that users are at increased risk of cancers, with users of black, brown and red hair dyes having a slightly higher risk than those who use lighter dyes. Hair itself is not living, it is attached to the living tissue of the scalp. When you colour your hair, some of the chemicals in the dye can penetrate your scalp and enter the bloodstream.