

Traditional healers ask to be regulated

TAMAR KAHN
Science and Health Editor

CAPE TOWN - Traditional healers yesterday called for their sector to be regulated by the government, telling MPs this was the best way to protect consumers.

There is no official oversight of traditional healers or the medicines they provide to their patients in SA, although Parliament passed the Traditional Health Practitioners Act in 2007. The act provides for a Traditional Healers' Council to oversee the profession in a similar manner to the Allied Health Practitioners Association, but members have yet to be appointed. Similarly, the R4bn annual trade in African traditional medicines is free of the kind of regulatory oversight applied to allopathic (western) medicines, leaving patients who use these medicines without any guarantees of the safety, quality and efficacy of the products they purchase.

The Medicines Control Council had "totally neglected" African traditional medicine, said Solly Nduku, general secretary of the National Unitary Professional Association for African Traditional Health Practitioners of SA.

"There is a dire need to test traditional medicines in clinical trials to protect consumers and advance practitioners. It requires meaningful involvement of the practitioners themselves," Mr Nduku told members of Parliament's health committee. African traditional medicines had existed for "time immemorial" but had been marginalised, he said. "We have struggled in vain to have a meeting with the minister of health. Our sector is not a priority to the Department of Health," he said.

The committee's chairman, Bevan Goqwana, said safety was paramount. The majority of patients admitted to hospital with renal failure in the Eastern Cape



Solly Nduku

had been prescribed traditional medicines, he said.

Traditional Healers Organisation national organiser Phephisile Maseko said there were about 183,000 practitioners in SA, 72,000 of whom belonged to her organisation. "It is difficult for us as an organisation to control some of the ill practices that occur," she said, calling for a statutory body to be established to deal with complaints of malpractice.

Ms Maseko said the government was also failing to safeguard supplies of African traditional medicines as little attention was being paid to the cultivation and preservation of the plants and animals from which these were obtained.

Research commissioned by the Health Systems Trust, published in 2007, found that uncontrolled hunting and gathering was threatening the future of the industry. It also found that African traditional medicines were used by seven out of 10 black South Africans from all walks of life, often in conjunction with western medicine.

There is virtually no commercial cultivation of the plants and animals used in traditional remedies, which are mostly harvested from the wild. As a result some of the most highly prized indigenous plants, such as African wild ginger, have been pushed to the brink of extinction. kahnt@bdfm.co.za

Traditional healers ask to be regulated

Date: 15 November 2012

Page Number: 6

Language: English

Categories: Health - General

Publication: BUSINESS DAY

Author: TAMAR KAHN



The copyright act of 1978 (as amended) prohibits the reproduction of this copy IN ANY FORMAT, (See Clause 5 Terms & Conditions) without prior permission of the original publisher.