Bridging conventional and traditional medicine in survivorship care: Towards integrated healing in Malaysia

Lim Ren Jye, Chan Si Yan

Sunway TCM Centre, Sunway Healthcare Group, 47500, Bandar Sunway, Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Cancer survivorship poses multifaceted challenges that extend beyond the end of clinical treatment, requiring a holistic and patient-centered approach. In Malaysia's culturally diverse landscape, many survivors incorporate Traditional and Complementary Medicine (TCM)—particularly Traditional Chinese Medicine—alongside conventional therapies to manage long-term side effects, support emotional well-being, and improve overall quality of life. This presentation explores the opportunities and challenges of bridging conventional oncology and traditional medicine in survivorship care. It focuses on the shared goals of both systems: enhancing physical recovery, managing chronic symptoms, supporting emotional and spiritual health, and reducing the risk of recurrence. Drawing from recent research, clinical experience, and stakeholder insights, we present successful integrative care models involving breast, prostate, head and neck, pancreatic, and hepatocellular cancers. These examples highlight how thoughtful integration—when guided by evidence, safety, and mutual respect—can offer meaningful benefits for survivors. We also address barriers to integration, including limited cross-disciplinary communication, lack of standardized protocols, and the need for greater awareness among both patients and healthcare providers. Strategies for overcoming these gaps include improved education, policy development, and inter-professional collaboration. Malaysia is uniquely positioned to lead in the development of culturally sensitive, integrative survivorship care that honors traditional healing practices while upholding the standards of modern medicine. By reimagining survivorship care as a partnership between these systems, we can empower patients, respect cultural identities, and promote a more inclusive, compassionate model of healing—one that supports not just survival, but whole-person recovery.

Keywords: Neoplasms/therapy, complementary therapies, integrative medicine, survivors/psychology, cultural competency