

Traditional Chinese doctors fight federal regulation under Bill C-51

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Doctors of Chinese medicine across Canada have joined forces to fight the federal government's controversial Bill C-51 — a proposed law that critics say will make many natural health products unavailable, including Chinese herbs.

If approved, the federal bill would treat natural health products like herbs, vitamins and minerals as drugs, making it harder to import, sell or dispense them.

Doctors of traditional Chinese medicine, or TCM, say their herbs would have to pass Western-style clinical trials under Bill C-51.

Dr. Henry Lu, who runs the International College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Vancouver, said that's like saying, 'You can speak Chinese — but use English grammar.'

"You should allow TCM practitioners to practise the way they have been practising," Lu said.

Peter Wood, who heads the TCM Association of B.C., said the bill would hobble Chinese medicine, and be a giant step backward.

"It's basically taking choice away from Canadians on which model of medicine they'd like to use," Wood said.

Five-thousand years of history has already proven TCM medicine is safe, he said.

"I don't know of any cases of anything going awry. And if there are, there are far fewer than there are deaths that happen from pharmaceutical drugs," Wood added.

Bill C-51 draws national opposition

Those opposed to Bill C-51 are hoping to rally public support to quash the bill before it becomes law, which is expected to happen in the fall. Websites and online groups have sprung up across the country imploring people to lobby their MPs to halt progress of the bill.

Critics believe Bill C-51 will outlaw up to 60 per cent of natural health products currently sold in Canada, and penalize parents who give herbs or supplements to their children.

They also argue that the government could designate any natural health product a prescription drug, making it available by prescription only, forcing smaller companies out of the market.

Many natural health product retailers and holistic health practitioners maintain major drug companies lobbied for the bill, but the government has maintained it's about safety.

Federal Health Minister Tony Clement has defended the bill, saying that it will allow the federal government to continuously monitor the safety of products even after they have been approved.