# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION NO. 887**

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**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 16)**

**Mr N Singh (IFP) to ask the Minister of Health:**

Whether, given the current high costs of medicine and western medical treatments, he will consider the establishment of public/private partnerships as well as private Centers for Medical Innovation and Research in the Republic, whereby innovative and cost-effective traditional alternatives to conventional western medicine can, with the informed consent of the patients, be explored and developed by the SA Medical Professionals for the benefit of all the citizens; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the further relevant details?

**NW2037E**

###### REPLY:

A significant proportion of the South African population use traditional medicine as part of primary healthcare. It is therefore important that government integrates traditional medicine as part of the mainstream western medicine.

As a first step in this direction, Parliament established the Traditional Health Practitioners Act, which regulates and recognises traditional health practice in South Africa. An interim Council has been was established which will regulate the practice of Traditional medicine in South Africa. The Council will register persons as practitioners that meet the requirements to be a Traditional Health Practitioner. Registered persons will be required to adhere to a code of conduct and practice guidelines.

In addition to the regulation of the practitioner we need to also understand the “medicine”. In many cases the medicine is a plant or a mixture of plants and other products recommended by the traditional practitioner for the treatment of an ailment. Understanding the composition of these products and more importantly the potential active ingredients that influence diseases is crucial.

Traditional medicines offer massive opportunity for the treatment of diseases especially in areas where western medicine has been ineffective in addressing diseases. The Medical Research Council has been investigating the potential that traditional medicine could offer. They have established a Herbal Drugs Research Unit.

The Herbal Drugs Research Unit, based at Tshwane University of Technology, uses modern scientific techniques to understand the true value of herbal-based traditional medicine (phytomedicines). The unit has developed extraction techniques that would contribute to the global understanding of how the “active ingredients” can be extracted from plant based materials. After the extraction of these “active ingredients” the unit also describes the chemical characteristics of the product and the plant. This information becomes part of a larger online database so that other researchers can also access information of such medicinal plants.

Government provides a platform across various sectors for research into ATM. This is through collaboration with institutions including the Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Agricultural Research Council (ARC), the Medicines Research Council (MRC), Department of Agriculture (DoA) as well as Department of Science and Technology (DST). Traditional medicine research is conducted at several institutions, facilitated by funding from government through the National Research Foundation (NRF), and other parastatal organisations as part of indigenous knowledge systems (IKSs). Flagship programmes are presently running in key institutions with a focus on medicinal plants for the development of immunomodulators, microbicides, anti-diabetic medicines, anti-tuberculosis medicines, antimalarial agents and anti-cancer medicines. Across other institutions, there is a focus on the research in ATM for antihypertensive, anti-diabetic, antimalarial, antimicrobial and anti-HIV medicines. This work would form the opportunity for public private partnership in the commercialisation of molecules that have shown pre-clinical potential.

END.