The Economics of Integrative Medicine: An emerging paradigm in healthcare

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ABSTRACT

The 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century have seen a dramatic change in the burden of illness from acute infectious disease to chronic noncommunicable disease (NCD), and today NCDs are the largest cause of death in people of working age. NCDs also account for over 60% of global mortality especially in the less wealthy nations. The reduction in acute and infectious disease is a reflection of the effectiveness of mainstream biomedical systems, but these are proving increasingly expensive and ineffective in dealing with the health crisis caused by NCDs. This paper will posit that an alternative model of healthcare, that of Integrative Medicine, presents as a relatively cost-effective and efficacious model for nation-states in the Pacific Island Region to adopt in dealing with their health issues. Drawing on examples from across the world, the argument will be made that adoption of an integrative medicine model will have both direct and indirect savings in healthcare costs as well as lead to improved performance and productivity in the workforce. Finally, the paper will look at some of the critical issues relating to the adoption of such a model and their implications for small island nations.