

This is an overview of the 4-year program of traditional Thai medicine at Rangsit University, Bangkok.

Source: www.nationmultimedia.com

TRADITIONAL THAI MEDICINE TO THE FORE

The Faculty of Oriental Medicine at Rangsit University, the first undergraduate programme of its kind in Thailand, has been operational for three years. Its aim is to develop Thai traditional medicines. But faculty members say modern Thais are skeptical of the old ways

“Thai traditional medicine doctors are not masseurs, but some people believe they are, says Sothira Panichprecha, a third-year student in the Faculty of Oriental Medicine.

“They call our faculty members the ‘faculty of masseuses’ and wonder if we’ll be working as masseuses when we graduate. Also, they doubt whether this form of treatment can actually cure illness,” she says.



Thai herbs used in traditional medicine.

Surapote Wongyai, dean of the Faculty of Oriental Medicine, says misunderstandings and ignorance about Thai traditional medicine has tainted its image. “The Ministry of Health wants to promote Thai traditional medicine, so a lot of medical licenses were issued to doctors. Many aren’t quacks,” he says, “but when the doctors are bad, people lose faith. The knowledge is out there, but it’s not organised. We need to assimilate the information to study it seriously.” Surapote also said that Rangsit University’s course is the first of its kind in Thailand. “Previously, Thai traditional medicine was learnt by word or mouth. It was handed down for generations. But times are changing,” she says.

Thai traditional medicine was derived from Chinese traditional medicine and Ayurvedic therapy. Both Thai and Chinese traditional medicine use herbs and other natural ingredients to balance the system.

Students at Rangsit study Thai traditional pharmacy, medicine and massage. “Massage is just one of many ways to treat patients. Doctors first diagnose, then prescribe, and then evaluate their treatment,” says Surapote, who’s one of 12 herbal experts in the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation.

Kessarín Chalermchaiwattana, a third-year student in Faculty of Oriental Medicine, says that sound knowledge in theory makes her feel more confidence during practical application. Kessarín earned her first bachelor's degree in pharmacy from Silpakorn University and is now studying for a second bachelor's degree in traditional Oriental medicine. Her goal is to open a Thai traditional medical clinic combined with a Western pharmacy.

“People think that Thai traditional medicine is outdated, so we need to use high technology to develop, evaluate and assess the medicines,” Surapote says. “Repackaging them could also help gain acceptance.”

The Oriental medicine programme requires 150 credits. More than half is spent on laboratory, practice and hands-on experience. An internship of 1,000 hours - 400 in Thai medicine, 300 in pharmacy and 300 in massage - is mandatory.

“I get to see the real thing,” says Apirach Prachasupap, another third-year student. “To diagnose, not only do you feel the pulse, but you also notice the patients' face colour and walking postures, and you ask innumerable questions about their lifestyles.”

Seven centres have been opened to assist these students and promote Thai traditional medicine: a Thai traditional medicine clinic, acupuncture clinic, Oriental beauty centre, massage laboratory and spa, herbal-products research and development centre, botanical garden, and an Oriental medicine health centre. “The centres benefit both our students and the public,” says Surapote, the school's dean.

The first batch of bachelor's degree graduates will complete the programme in March 2007. The four-year programme is taught in Thai and is limited to 100-120 students a year. The tuition fee is Bt440,000.

For more information, call (02) 997 2200-30, ext 3470 or 3279, send an e-mail query to surapote@rangsit.ac.th or log on to www.rsu.ac.th/oriental_med.

**Copyright 2004 Nation Multimedia Group
44 Moo 10 Bang Na-Trat KM 4.5, Bang Na district, Bangkok 10260 Thailand
Tel 66-2-325-5555, 66-2-317-0420 and 66-2-316-5900 ; Fax 66-2-317-2071**