

Traditional healers (mor pheun baan) in Southern Thailand: Chaow baan's (local people) perceptions and experiences of their roles



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Objectives

The following five objectives of this study then are to:

- Investigate the roles of traditional healers in Southern Thailand
- Explore the perceptions and experiences of patients of traditional healers
- Examine the possibilities for co-operation between modern and traditional healing
- Determine the way traditional healers play a role for Thai health in the Thai health care systems
- Analyse the social factors supporting traditional healers' role in the Thai health care systems



Summary of session

1. What brings people to consult traditional healers?
2. Who are the appropriate traditional healers?
3. What are seeking healthcare behaviours?
4. How do people reimburse traditional healers?
5. Conclusion



What brings people to consult traditional healers?

Advantages of traditional healing

- There are closer relationship between healers and patients
- It is well suited to their lifestyle
- It offers lower cost than that of modern doctors
- It is less time-consuming
- Their health expertise is more trusted than modern doctors (for minor illnesses, chronic ill health conditions and unclassifiable illnesses)

Drawbacks of modern medicine

- **It is too time-consuming/ complicated service system**

An account was given by a 75-year-old woman, *Yai Chabha*, who suggested how time consuming the service of modern medicine is:

I am too tired because of waiting for a long time. Even if I have been waiting for a long time in the morning, frequently they transfer me to the queue for the afternoon shift. There are not many doctors present. Some days there are only two doctors on duty; some days there is only one and some days there are 3 accessible doctors. Unfortunately, there are lots and lots of patients each day.

Drawbacks of modern medicine

- **Patients are still having unsatisfactory experiences and feel mistrust of the help provided by modern doctors**

Taa Kun, the 94-year-old man, described how a medical mistake resulted in his wife's death:

I do not go the *rong bhayabarn* (modern hospital) unless it is absolutely necessary. Why don't I want to go? My wife died because of *mor loung* (modern doctor). At that time we went to the *rong bhayabarn* in the morning and came back home at about 12 pm. because the doctor said it was fine, and we had nothing to worry about. About 30 minutes after we arrived home she died. How did the doctor carry out this diagnosis? I was very angry and upset. I would [not] go to the *rong bhayabarn* [any] more.



Drawbacks of modern medicine

- There are insufficient medical supplies and care for patients with chronic health conditions - muscle paralysis/ weakness
- Modern medicine provides help for the initial state of emergency and then discharges patients to recuperate at home
- Even though modern health care practitioners follow up with regular checking of the patients' condition and give them tablets, patients and family members often ask traditional healers to help

- *Lung Dang* (69 years old) had weak muscles and took stewed herbal medicine as well as other forms of herbal medicine because he wants to improve his condition. He stated:

“I also go to see *mor baan* (traditional healer) because I am worried that I might not be able to walk for the rest of my life. Now I can walk as usual because of *ya samun prai*” (stewed herbal medicine). I don’t believe modern medicine much for my health condition. Many are healed by traditional healer”.



Who are the appropriate traditional healers?

- Traditional healers in the community
- Traditional healers outside the community
- *Pak to pak* (word of mouth) recommendation greatly affects people's view of the traditional healers
- Healer's gender

Paa Somsri discussed her considerations about which traditional healers to engage to help with her lower abdominal pain:

[I] almost always seek help from Paa Jeim. She can massage my whole body. [I] will not allow male healers to massage my whole body. [For instance], a female healer can massage my abdomen, focusing more on some parts of my abdomen than others. Male healers can only help me with something like ankle pain relief.

Seeking healthcare behaviour

- Switching healers as well as healing forms when they considered that the initial treatment failed to cure
- Complementing treatment with alternative forms to increase healing capacity
- Staying with the same healer for some disorders or symptoms
- Some believe in an ongoing search for additional healers as they may be lucky enough eventually to find the correct healers to help with the illness
- Health care seeking behaviour reflects *lang neau chorp lang ya*; different persons prefer different healing methods – persist on trying alternative choice



Traditional practice prior to receiving treatment

- Contributing to the ceremony called *wai kru* (the ceremony showing respect to ancestor healers)
- This traditional demonstration of giving ceremonial materials is to show respect and inform the healer of one's needs.
- Providing right diagnosis and treatment
- The patients prepare the ceremonial items in a certain way because different sorts of illness and health problems require different symbols to enhance recovery



The items taken when seeking help from traditional healers



The basic items used for treating eye disorders (*tor nua*)



Reimbursement healers

- There is a traditional practice called *wai kru*
- It is considered to have influence on patients' health
- Patients might not fully recover or the illness may return
- Traditionally, patients provide traditional objects and a provide a traditional payment
- Patients now tend to use money for payment
- Many combine both options



Traditional items



In front of traditional healer's forefather statue



Wai kru ceremony performed with family members

Conclusion

- People still seek help of traditional healers even though modern medicine has advance development
- They do not rely on one particular healing model
- There have a traditional practice of asking for help and of reimbursement of traditional healers when healed
- Traditional healing is much valued
- It is a primary care resource for citizens of rural southern Thailand
- They are growing co-operation with mainstream health systems