

TRADITIONAL MEDICINE UNIT AND ITS IMPACT IN THE COMMUNITIES OF DOROKHA DUNGKHAG.

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Abstract

Traditional Medicines has been practiced for millennia, resulting in a particularly long and rich heritage that continues to influence growing acceptance of the efficacy and clinical use of traditional herbal medicines. In Bhutan, the system of traditional medicine was officially integrated into the health care system in 1967. This essay intends to introduce some of the current situations and challenges faced by the Traditional Medicine Units in Bhutan. Awareness campaigns on the availability and health benefits of traditional medicines have been organized in Dorokha Dungkhag under Samtse Dzongkhag. Such awareness campaigns have significantly helped the community people to understand more about traditional medicine encouraging them to visit the unit for medical care.

Background

“Nature never did betray the heart that loved her”- is what the Romantic Poet, William Wordsworth asserted but in our almost suicidal enthusiasm to hit upon an artificial solution to our natural problems, we are neglecting this vital truth. Was it not Gautama, the enlightened one, who also advised us, “Look onto yourself for solution to your problems”. The unbridled growth of industrialism, accentuated by the haphazard and reckless development of modern science and technology has created a situation which prevents man from bestowing adequate care and attention even to his minimal personal health needs. Health is not something that can be purchased in a bottle from a drug store but a condition built over the years from within by our own vital process through conscientious efforts and self-control or will power. Good health is nature’s gift to man but man being preoccupied with a mechanical life-style, has alienated himself from nature.

Traditional Medicines around the world has been practiced for millennia, resulting in a particularly long and rich heritage that continues to influence growing acceptance of the efficacy and clinical use of traditional herbal medicines. The culture, social and legislative system of traditional medicine varies considerably around the world. In Bhutan, the system of traditional medicine was officially integrated into the health care system in 1967. In the midst of the present boom in natural products and herbal medicines, this essay intends to introduce some of the most current situations and challenges that the Traditional Medicine Units all over the country faces.

Man has eternally endeavored to keep himself free from three types of miseries:

(1) Miseries arising out of ones own physique, (2) miseries caused by factors including organisms surrounding him and, (3) miseries caused by super natural elements. Man’s aspirations to overcome these miseries are reflected in his three eternal desires, namely, (1) the desire to live a long and healthy life. (2) The desire to acquire wealth for use in bad days, and (3) the desire to attain salvation or nirvana after death. For a long and healthy life; different drugs, diet and drinks were repeatedly experimented upon and suitable as well as therapeutically useful ones were selected and propagated. The Traditional Medicine Unit of Dorokha was established in 2006 as the only unit of the periphery BHUs under Samtse

District Health Office. It was set up as per the demand from the public and gewog administration.

Advocacy on Traditional Medicine and its treatments:

The Traditional Medicine Unit has an important part to play in the life of a person and indirectly or directly to the community. It is here that man gets cured from his deadly diseases to save his precious life. In the Traditional Medicine Unit, we advice patients on the proper health care based on the knowledge of *gSo- ba Rig- pa*. The patients in turn help in spreading the awareness of this health care to the community.

To create awareness of our traditional medicine in Bhutan and to make the public fully aware of its benefits and also to sustain our traditional medicine health care system, I have conducted numerous health campaigns and made a few programs in relation to traditional medicine and its treatments. This was because most people failed to understand about its efficacy, effectiveness, and benefits of our traditional medicine. The aim of the advocacy is to strengthen, enhance, and make adequate availability of traditional medicine services in the communities.

When I was in Haa Dzongkhag , I have visited each and every school twice a year to advocate on our traditional medicines and its treatments. Besides that, I have also visited different gewogs including Gakiling and Sombeykha. Here in Dorokha Dungkhag, patients usually visit the Traditional Medicine Unit without prior knowledge and awareness. Considering the limited knowledge of the people on the traditional medicine, it indicates that the promotion and advocacy needs to be organized in order to increase people's awareness on the traditional medicine system and sustainability in the long run for the benefit of the public. Therefore, I have also conducted advocacy on traditional medicine and its treatments during my field visit to BHUs' under Dorokha Dungkhag which takes around 4-5 hours walk through the rugged mountainous terrain. I have even taken classes to advocate on traditional medicines and its treatments to higher classes in Dorokha Middle Secondary School so that they can help to disseminate the ideas in their villages. This kind of awareness campaigns makes people understand about the traditional medicine and many of them avail its services.

We also do a lot of cross-referrals between modern and traditional medicine based on patient needs. For instance, a skin related and sinusitis cases were treated in the modern hospital for several times but no improvement was shown. Then, the person having that particular disease was able to be cured with our traditional medicines and golden needle therapy. I would like to share to my colleagues working in and around the country that with my little knowledge and techniques, I have been able to cure 90% of the skin related diseases with the application of golden needle therapy on the infected skins. Those patients were the ones who were actually referred from our modern hospitals here in Dorokha. Most of the patients were the students of Dorokha Middle Secondary School who suffered from contagious skin diseases as a result of poor hygiene and contaminated water.

Walking for many hours in the rugged mountainous terrain has been my biggest challenge but I am always pleased to visit different gewogs where patients also come from a long way to get treated. There are patients who are disabled and old who are not able to visit our unit in Dorokha, as they live in far flung places. Most of the cases that we have in our therapy section are skin related diseases which is one of the top most disease recorded in the year 2009. Basically, the visit to different BHUs is to provide treatment and follow up action for

the chronic patients as per the policy of Ministry of Health (MoH), “to reach to the unreached population” and it also aligns with the policy of promoting Community’s Health and Hygiene. The traditional medicine practitioners around the country also organize health campaigns and makes some programs related to health and hygiene so that the respective communities develop awareness in the field of health and hygiene. The communities take the hospital as a model to keep the environment clean and healthy.

Conclusion

Among the therapies and medicines, golden needle and moxibustion (Numtshug) are found to be very effective in the treatment of a wide range of illnesses and conditions. These have been practiced in the National Traditional Medicine Hospital, Thimphu and also in many traditional medicine units for decades. For further improvement in the delivery of these therapy services, we need to have well equipped facilities like air tight rooms, pressure cookers, pots, stove and gas cylinder.

With the emergence of many communicable and non-communicable diseases, the discharge of therapy services in an effective and safe manner has been a concern and had accorded high priority by our department. The lack of support in developing these facilities will hinder the promotion of traditional medicine system in our country.