

# TREATMENT OF CANCER BY THAI FOLK DOCTOR: A CASE STUDY IN CENTRAL REGION OF THAILAND

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## ABSTRACT

In Thailand, it was clear that the non-communicable diseases were the main cause of death, about 320,000 people dead per year. Cancer was one in five of the chronic non-communicable diseases, and was one of the top 10 diseases that were the cause of human death today. Folk medicine was an alternative medicine in Thailand. This research was aim to collect cancer treatment knowledge of folk medicine from folk healers, and to analyze folk wisdom about the symptoms, diagnosis, drug formulation, and treatment methods of cancer by folk doctors. The sample group in this research was consist of 4 folk doctors, who have inherited the knowledge from the ancestors, and 7 cancer patients, who were treated by folk healers. This was qualitative research method using qualitative research by in-depth interview. The tools were questionnaire, and in-depth interview form for folk doctors. Another tools were questionnaire, and in-depth interview form for the patients. The first folk doctor was Mr. Charoen Sangphap, 61 years old, the second folk doctor was Mrs. Som-O Kirkchaiwan, 78 years old, the third folk doctor was Mr. Prempree Ruayphinich, 68 years old, and the fourth folk doctor was Mr. Choocheep Kongkasri, 81 years old. Based on cancer patients interviewing, the details were as follows: the first patient was female, suffering from breast cancer, the second patient was female, suffering from bowel cancer, the third patient was female, suffering from breast cancer, the fourth patient was female, suffering from breast cancer, the fifth patient was male, suffering from liver cancer, the sixth patient was female, suffering from breast cancer, and the seventh patient was male, suffering from bowel cancer, respectively. The diagnosis and treatment of each folk doctor was different depending on the knowledge that has been received, which was mainly treated with herbal medicines. Cancer treatment must refrain from forbidden food. Everyone was satisfied with the treatment by folk doctor.

**Keywords:** Folk doctor, Herbal medicines, Cancer

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) were the major problem in worldwide. In Thailand, it was clear that the non-communicable diseases were the main cause of death, about 320,000 people dead per year. Cancer was one in five of the chronic non-communicable diseases, and was one of the top 10 diseases that were the cause of human death today. The International Organization for Cancer Research (IARC) [1] has pointed out that the new cancer patients will increase to 18.1 million people worldwide by the end of 2018, and 9.6 million people dead from cancer. Causes of death, including breast cancer, liver cancer, colon cancer, lung cancer, cervical cancer, and etc. Cancer was an important public health problem in Thailand. Even though there were many new technologies coming in today. Modern medicine was more effective, but still cannot solve some health problems, and cancer treatment. Thai folk medicine still plays a role in cancer treatment, and also in other disease such as paralysis [2].

Folk medicine was an alternative medicine in Thailand. Because of modern medicine was a high cost health care system, therefore it was a limitation of modern medicine that was not able to serve people thoroughly, so there are many Thai people were choose to treat, and care for health by folk medicine. However, folk medicine has some limitations such as method of drug taking. The modern drug was easier to eat than traditional Thai drug. In some cases the folk medicine cannot solve, such as surgery, and serious accident. However, folk healers still have a role in preserving and caring for the health of rural people until now. From searching the information of folk doctor directory from the Department of Thai Traditional and Alternative Medicine Development, The 4 folk doctors were selected for this study.

## OBJECTIVE

1. To collect cancer treatment knowledge of folk medicine from folk healers
2. To analyze folk wisdom about the symptoms, diagnosis, drug formulation, and treatment methods of cancer by folk doctors.

## METHODOLOGY

This was qualitative research methodology. Information collecting from books, relevant research, and in-depth interview from 4 folk doctors with expertise in cancer treatment, and 7 cancer patients were treated by folk doctors. The tools were questionnaire, and in-depth interview form for Thai folk healers. Another tools were questionnaire, and in-depth interview form for the patients. In-depth interviews and observation, by using open-ended questions, note taking, and video recording. Note taking, and video recording were transcribed, and summary. Verify the accuracy and integrity of information. Data were analyzed as separate issues, according to the objective of the study.

## RESULTS

The folk doctor was the main role in maintaining the health of the local people by using belief principles, and practices. The 4 folk doctors lived in central region of Thailand. The first folk doctor, Mr. Charoen Sangphap, 61 years old, has inherited the knowledge from the ancestors, and has studied more pharmacy with senior folk doctors. He has experienced in treating diseases for about 40 years by using single herb, herbal formulation, ready-to-use formula, pain relief by oil massage, holy water, blow-spraying, splint, herbal steam, herbal compress, and use of spells. He said that cancer was caused by a severe allergic reaction, abnormal element, and lead receiving. Symptom of liver cancer was taut belly, green belly, uneatable, lympsy symptom, skin pale, black nails, and dull skin. Symptom of skin cancer was dull skin, hair loss, nail loss, and anemia. Symptom of lung cancer was black blood, black defecation, and hot body over time, and frequent thirsty. Symptom of breast cancer was the lump in the breast. Before treatment he let patients or relatives light the incense, and pay respect to Dr. Jivaka Komārabhacca, toss tally; if toss and one upside down and one turned up, be able to heal. If both were facing up or upside down, be not able to heal. Cancer treatment procedure by taking a decoction. The drug formulation will look from the skin color, age, occupation of the patient. Black people is salty blood, white people is sour blood, and drug formulation for patients eat will not be the same. Forbidden food for cancer will include animal internal organs, stinkbean, impala lily, spodilla, durian, muskmelon, barking deer, and beef.

The second folk doctor, Mrs. Som-O Kirkchaiwan, 78 years old, has inherited the knowledge from the ancestors, and has studied with senior folk doctor. She has experienced in treating diseases for about 21 years by using meditation, herbal formulations, ready-to-use formulas, pain relief by oil massage, holy water, blow-spraying, and use of spells. She said that cancer was caused by eating habit. Symptom of breast cancer was pain, burning sensation, swelling, and ulcers in the breast. Uterine cancer, bowel cancer, bone cancer, were often itchy symptoms, if the patient has received chemotherapy, it will be heat, and pain. Before treatment, he must show respect for teachers, sweep the medicine to see sputum of the patients. Treatment procedure was poultice using at some position on the body. The poultice consists of 1 kg of beef, and mashed chicken, 300 g of shrimp, and eel, leaves of *Murraya siamensis* Craib. Everything were chopped together and mix with half a kilogram of coconut cream, then bring the poultice on the back, neck, and breast about 1 hour. If the breast has a wound, do not plaster on the wound. After the mask was finished, use white clay filler mixed with liqueur, apply and mask for 5-10 minutes, and take herbal medicine, which was consists of 21 species of medicinal plant. Contra indications and precautions during treatment were must not eat seafood, chicken, eel, pig tail, pig head, pig tongue, internal organs, and not go to the funeral.

The third folk doctor, Mr. Prempree Ruayphinich, 68 years old, has inherited the knowledge from the ancestors, which has experienced in treating diseases for 54 years by using herbal formulations, ready-to-use formulas, and pain relief by oil massage, holy water, splint, and use of spells. The tools for treatment consisted of knives, wooden boards, and chopped wood. He said that cancer was caused by eating habit, and irregular menstruation. The symptom of cancer was cloudy sclera, and see the blood vessel. Before treatment, he

must show respect for teachers, use spells to summon the mind or spirit into the chopped wood, likewise the chopped wood was the body of the patient and chopped in the wood to treat cancer. Treatment procedure was use a decoction with bolus. In case of decoction, it was consist of more than 20 species of medicinal plant. In case of bolus, it was consist of kaffir lime containing bergamot, black pepper, long pepper, mucilage from leaves of aloe, and etc. Cancer treatment with herbal medicine uses all the same drugs. It will add or enhance the drug, depending on the patient's condition. The flavor of the medicine is different, depending on the patient's condition. Contra indications and precautions during treatment were forbidden foods more than 20 types.

The fourth folk doctor, Mr. Choocheep Kongkasri, 81 years old, has inherited the knowledge from the ancestors, and study further by observing, training, and massage lessons from Wat Pho. He has experienced in treating diseases for about 27 years by using herbal formulations, ready-to-use formulas, and pain relief by oil massage. He said that cancer was caused by receiving carcinogen such as smoke. Symptom of breast cancer was swollen, and cyst in the breast. Symptom of throat cancer was the base of the tongue will be wound, and swollen neck like a goiter with blood in mouth. Liver cancer was jaundice, pale face, and swollen face due to liver deficiency. Lung cancer was a pant, pale, thin, and dark skin color. Uterine cancer was irregular menstruation, menstrual period was black, wedge, vaginal discharge, and dark skin color. Before treatment, he must show respect for teachers. Treatment procedure was use a decoction and capsules which was the same drug for lung, liver and intestinal cancer. It was consist of more than 5 types of medicinal plant. For uterine cancer, breast cancer, throat cancer, each was consist of more than 5 types of medicinal plant, but there was not the same formula. The flavor of the medicine was bitter. Contra indications and precautions during treatment were not eat sour, salty food, pickled fish, and stingray.

Based on cancer patients interviewing, who were treated by folk healers, the details were as follows: the first patient, who had been treated by Mr. Som-O Kirkchaiwan, was a 51 years old female, suffering from breast cancer. This patient was treated with only this doctor and has never been treated with modern medicine. Treatment with this doctor for about 5-6 years by mean of a poultice and taking medicine. After treatment, the patient improved weight gain, no lymph flowing from the breast, and no breast pain. At present, there is no symptoms, treatment satisfaction was very satisfied.

The second patient, who had been treated by Mr. Prempree Ruayphinich, was a 58 years old female, suffering from bowel cancer. She was treated by modern medicine at the age of 35-36 years. Treatment with modern medicine at that time was not improved. Symptoms of stomach pain, thin body, unable to eat food were still. When the condition does not improved, he decided to come to this doctor. He was take bolus, bergamot, decoction, and wooden sitting. After the treatment of pain reduced, normal taking, eating normally, treatment with this doctor about 1 year and went to the hospital, it was found that there was no problem. Treatment satisfaction was very satisfied, and the service of the folk doctor was friendly.

The third patient, who had been treated by Mr. Prempree Ruayphinich, was a 27 years old female, suffering from breast cancer. She was examined with modern medicine, and found necrosis pieces. Therefore, a relative recommended to treat by this doctor. She was treated for 2-3 months with a wooden sitting, together with 9 pots of decoction. When taking 7 pots of decoction, the symptom was normal, nothing serious. Therefore she went to check with the modern doctor to know if there was a lump or not, then still found a lump. So, she stop taking the decoction, and went to get treatment with modern medicine, it takes about 7 months to maintain. At present, there is no symptoms. This patient was satisfied with the treatment results, because the treatment with herbal medicine does not have a negative effect, didn't make the symptoms worse, but may not see clear results. She was satisfied with the service because this doctor provide help and advice as well.

The fourth patient, who had been treated by Mr. Prempree Ruayphinich, was a 21 years old female, suffering from breast cancer. She came to treated with taking medicine and sitting on the wood, it takes about 1 year to maintain. After that, symptom was improved, pain decreased, and eating more. But she went to work hard, and got swollen again. Then, she went to check with the modern medicine doctor, it was found the cysts. She was no time to go to Mr. Prempree Ruayphinich. Therefore, she has received treatment with only modern medicine. At present, there are no symptoms. This patient was satisfied with the treatment by folk doctor because the symptom was improved.

The fifth patient, who had been treated by Mr. Choocheep Kongkasri, was a 52 years old male, suffering from liver cancer. Hair loss, thin, and lose weight continuously. The patient has received chemotherapy, but the body collapse, becomes thinner, no strength, and he can't remember anyone because of the chemotherapy effect. During the wait for get a new more powerful chemotherapy drugs, he decided to go home, and choose to receive treatment by this folk doctor. By taking 14 pots of decoction, and 82 boxes of herbal medicine capsules, together with behavior modification, non-stress, and diet control. After 3 months, he was improved and recovered from cancer, and health returned to normal.

The sixth patient, who had been treated by Mr. Choocheep Kongkasri, was a 53 years old female, she has an annual health check, it was found breast cancer, therefore she had surgery, and after that cancer spread to the lymph nodes, and then she has decided to treat by chemotherapy, and together choose to treat by this folk doctor. By taking decoction, and herbal medicine capsules. After taking the drug for 4 months, she get better, and recover from breast cancer. But modern medicine doctor was still gave cancer control pills within 5 years. At present, the patient has an annual health check, no abnormalities were found.

The seventh patient, who had been treated by Mr. Choocheep Kongkasri, was a 50 years old male, suffering from bowel cancer, the stool was a solid lump with blood. He choose to treat by this folk doctor. By taking decoction. After taking 2 pots of decoction, the digestive system start to be normal, no bleeding, no pain, and have taken herbal medicine as a supplementary tonic.

### CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The number of folk doctors were 4 people, which was consist of 1 female, and 3 males. All of them have inherited knowledge from the ancestors, and have studied from the senior folk doctors. The diagnosis and treatment of each folk doctor was different depending on the knowledge that has been received, which was mainly treated with herbal medicines. Some folk doctors use methods of healing with beliefs and rituals combined with herbal medicines. The number of patients were 7 people, which was consist of 5 females, and 2 males. There were 4 females had a breast cancer, 1 female had a bowel cancer, 1 male had a liver cancer, and 1 male had a bowel cancer. Everyone was satisfied with the treatment by folk doctor. Cancer treatment must refrain from forbidden food, which the study results correspond with Thai Traditional Medical Rehabilitation Foundation, and S. Chandramano [3, 4].

It should be promote the recording of the healing information of the folk healers in order to develop and disseminate knowledge to be more acceptable. It should be encourage the development of drug formulations of folk healers to be more effective. It should be support the folk doctor to transfer knowledge to those who care for the local wisdom to continue.

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