

# THAI TRADITIONAL MEDICINE FOR DIABETES: A CASE STUDY OF THAI TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN CENTRAL THAILAND

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## ABSTRACT

This research employed the qualitative research technique that mainly aimed to collect diabetes treatment data from Thai Traditional Medicine, and to study the treatment procedures by mean of Thai Traditional Medicine. This study focused on two Thai Traditional Medicine healers who were professionals in diabetes treatment. Data were collected by in-depth interview. Findings of this study revealed that the Theory of Thai Traditional Medicine had the folk idea for holistic healthcare, which was relevant to the way of Thai life. In term of Thai Traditional Medicine, diseases were mainly caused by nature, etiology was the origination of disease. Etiology was caused by four factors, hereinafter age, time, season, and environment. Thai Etiology stated that causes of disease were also from food, manner, temperature (hot and cold), deprivation from sleep or food and drink, continence, over workload, sadness, anger, and other physical and emotional risk behaviors. Four steps of Thai Traditional Medicine for diabetes were 1) Pre-treatment; Thai folk healers, and patients would do the guru worship (“Wai Kru” in Thai) that aimed to pray, and wish treatment all the best, 2) Diagnosis; it was consist of history taking, physical checking (some healers would also check the patient’s horoscope), 3) Treatment; the method for diabetes treatment was serving a hot drink formular, put their feet in hot water, detoxification, and etc. The traditional methods differed from healers, and their education. After treatment, folk healers would follow the patient’s symptom, and suggest them to go on a diet, and 4) Physical and mental restoration. Aafter treatment, the patients were getting better and satisfied with the procedure.

**Keywords:** Diabetes, Thai Traditional Medicine, Folk healers

## INTRODUCTION

Diabetes is a chronic disease that is one of the major health problems in the present world. In Thailand, the numbers of patients with diabetes have tended to be increasing, while the costs of diabetes treatment paid by patients and Thai government has been significantly growing. The more society transformed the worst way of healthy living. The modern world has changed people in society to be more rush, fewer times to eat, and exercise. They need a ready-to-eat food that is junk for their health. This changed life effects on their health problem with diabetes. This desease reduces the quality of life of the people. Patients may confront with diabetes complications such as nerve ending damage (neuropathy), Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD), Coronary Artery Disease (CAD), kidney disease (nephropathy), and foot damage. They required continuing medical care, and taking medicine that is imported from western countries. Some patients are compatible with modern medicine and drugs, but some confront intolerance and complications [1].

World Health Organization reported world health statistics that one of ten population had diabetes, and more than 7,000 patients were died by diabetes in 2012. In Thailand, 179,597 persons were new patients with diabetes in 2011, which the case rate was about 279.83 per 100,000 population and the cumulative patients (2007-2011) were 1,025,337 patients. The prevalence rate was 1,597.57 per 100,000 population (Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health). Ministry of Public Health, Thailand also reported that the fatality rate has been increased from the past ten years. In this regards, this implied that modern medicine does not entirely cure, the amount of patients with diabetes has remained at a high level. Diabetes impacts physical, mental, economic and social problems in Thailand which require for the solution [2, 3].

Thai Traditional Medicine is a choice to deal with health problems in Thai society. Thai Traditional Medicine is a medical process that follows the folk ideas of treatment, beliefs, and ethics from ancestors. Thai Traditional Medicine is a holistic medicine which takes care of both patient’s health and relatives’ emotion. Presently, there are a few Thai Traditional healers who have experienced in Thai Traditional Medicine for diabetes; however, Thai Traditional healers have lacked development so that the knowledge of Thai Traditional Medicine has been disappeared. Thus, the researcher would like to study the concept and processes of Thai Traditional Medicine for diabetes which the outcomes will be empirical evidence that contributes to the

development of Thai Traditional Medicine Program, and clinical practices. Besides, this study will restore Thai folk wisdom of Thai Traditional Medicine.

### **OBJECTIVE**

1. To collect the folk ideas of Thai Traditional Medicine for Diabetes treatment.
2. To study the treatment procedures using Thai Traditional Medicine for Diabetes.

### **EXPECTATION**

1. The research provides a precious knowledge about the diagnostic process of Thai Traditional Medicine, causes of disease, and medical treatment methods for diabetes.
2. Outcomes of this research will be empirical evidence that contributes to the course and clinical practices development in Thai Traditional Medicine.
3. Findings of this research will be an educational heritage of Thai Traditional Medicine and the restoration of the folk wisdom of Thai Traditional Medicine.

### **SCOPE OF RESEARCH**

#### **1. Scope of population**

Two Thai folk healers who were professionals in Thai Traditional Medicine for diabetes treatment.

#### **2. Scope of content**

This research concentrated on gathering the folk ideas, and medical procedure of Thai Traditional Medicine for diabetes treatment. Data collection was from in-depth interview and documentary research to provide answers for these research questions, objectives that were relevant to the conceptual framework.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The method employed a qualitative technique using document research to describe the phenomena of the study. The researcher collected data from primary, and secondary sources, such as books, academic journals, internet, and related researches. A semi-structured face-to-face in-depth interview with flexible questions was a research instrument. The population was two Thai folk healers, who have experienced in medical treatment for diabetes. The researcher asked permission to voice-record during the interview. Interviewees were guided the objectives and general information about the research. When the interviewing was completed, the researcher transcribed from voice recorder and compare with notepad, then categorized the classification followed by the research objectives. Data analysis has used the techniques of content analysis, and critical analysis approaches. The results of this research were presented by a descriptive summary.

### **RESULTS**

According to the study methods, the findings revealed that the idea of health care of Thai folk medicine was relies on indigenous cultures, and ethnics. The idea of Thai folk medicine has been shared by Thai folk healers in the local community. It was involved in norms, beliefs, socio-culture, and environment. The principle of Thai Traditional Medicine said that human sickness comes from natural causes, etiology (Samuttan in Thai). Etiology composed of age, time, season, and enviroment. These causes are risk behaviors that impact the human balance [4]. Results from the in-depth interview were as follows:

*Expert 1:* Mr. Charoen Sangphap, (61 years old, Figure 1) lived in Kanchanaburi Province. He was a natural park officer. He has held a license of Thai Traditional Medicine, and experienced in treatment for diabetes for more than 40 years. He has inherited the Thai Traditional Medicine knowledge from his grandfather, who was folk healer. He has first educated from Monsignor Mueng, Monsignor Daoreung, and Mr. Boon. He studied in advance level about herbal medicine from Mr. Sathun Pakphum at Panomthaun District, Kanchanaburi, and Mr. La-ong Buasiri at Tha Rab Temple in Ratchaburi. The method for diabetes treatment of him was serving a hot drink formular, which were depended on cases. For instances, the patient with dark skin had salty blood, in contrast to light skin patients, had sour blood, combination skin had sour-salty-blood, or sweet blood. Hot drink formulation for each patients will not be the same. Patients were suggested that they have to take the traditional hot drink formular two times a day before meals. Thai herbs were boiled in a clay pot and not added salt in the formular, in case of the patients were light skin people. If a patient was about to faint,

he would be treat him with the sugar-reducing drug (mulberry, thunbergia, and passion fruit). By this, if a patient with diabetes also had a hyperlipidemia, he would serve spicy herbal made from ginger, fingerroot, and galangal. After treatment, he recommended the patients avoid eating dessert, cultivated banana, sapodilla, melon, ivy gourd, and aquatic morning glory during taking hot drink formular.

*Expert 2:* Mrs. Som-O Kirkchaiwan (78 years old, Figure 2) lived in Ratchaburi. She was a business owner, and Thai traditional healer. She has experienced in medical treatment for diabetes for 21 years. She has been educated Thai Traditional Medicine from grandfather, and known about Thai herbs since 5-6 years old. In World War II period, she followed his grandfather to take care of patients. She studied at advance level for four years (2001-2004) from Mr. Boonmee Thongsri at Tha Rab Temple. Steps of curing for diabetes were physical checking (hand and body), and a touch of soul. If a patient had much sweat, and smoother skin, the patient might be with diabetes. Before treatment, she let the patient to pray, and respect (“Wai Kru”) to traditional guru. Apparatus for Wai Kru were flowers, 5 joss sticks, 5 candles, cigarette, and money (12 Baht). This set of tools were given to supernatural guru for requesting their help in the treatment, and also pay respect to the Great Master of Thai Traditional Medicine namely Dr. Jivaka Komārabhacca. She asked about history taking, for examples, the patient used to cure with modern medicine or not, or taken any drugs before came to her. If the patients had ever, she would ask them to put their feet in hot water. In case of the patients had swell feet, and wound, she would ask them to put their feet in in hot water with boiled sea holly leaves. In case of the patients had constipation, she would serve the laxative. The laxative was consist of *Smilax corbularia* Kunth, *Smilax glabra* Roxb, *Strychnos axillaris* Colebr, *Schefflera leucantha*, *Sea holly*, *Cryptolepis buchani* Roem & Schult, *Coscinium fenestratum* Colebr, Nut grass, Heart-leaved moonseed, *Cassumunar ginger*, *Bengal root*, *Glycosmis pentaphylla* Corr, Benjamin's fig, Brinjal, *Hydnophytum formicarum* Jack, *Suregada multiflorum*, Snake gourd and then ground it together. The patient would take this medicine before meals every other day on an empty stomach.

Figure 1  
Mr. Charoen Sangphap



Figure 2  
Mrs. Som-O Kirkchaiwan



### CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

In Thailand, the numbers of patients with diabetes have tended to be increasing. People need a ready-to-eat food that is junk for their health. This changed life effects on their health problem with diabetes. In Thailand, 179,597 persons were new patients with diabetes in 2011. Thai Traditional Medicine is a choice to deal with health problems in Thai society. According to the study methods, the findings revealed that the idea of health care of Thai folk medicine was relies on indigenous cultures, and ethnics. The principle of Thai Traditional Medicine said that human sickness comes from natural causes. The number of folk healers were 2 people, which was consist of 1 female, and 1 male. Both of them have inherited knowledge from the ancestors, and have studied from the senior folk doctors. Four steps of Thai Traditional Medicine for diabetes were Pre-treatment, Diagnosis, Treatment, and Physical and mental restoration. Thai folk medicine is important role in diabetes treatment, and also in other disease such as paralysis [5].

It should be carry on Thai folk wisdom, promote ideas, treatment process, and develop Thai pharmacopeias of Thai Traditional Medicine for disbetes treatment, besides it should be support the folk doctor to transfer knowledge to those who care for the local wisdom to continue.

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