



Complementary Cancer Treatment at Wat Khampramong: Thai Traditional Healthcare

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Abstract

The research documents the origin, practices and cultural format of Thai traditional healthcare in the Buddhist temple, Wat Khampramong, in Sakon Nakhon province and to study the cultural format of Thai traditional healthcare at that temple. The research is a qualitative study and the data analyzed through data triangulation method from data gathered from document analysis, field research data obtained from 25 research informants through the use of survey forms, interview forms, observation forms and from focus group discussions. The results found that the complementary healthcare treatment at Wat Khampramong consists of: 1. Modern medical treatment by licensed nurses who perform weekly blood samples of cancer patients, 2. Treatment by alternative methods, cancer treating herbal medicine, acupuncture and nutritional therapy, 3. Utilizing Buddhism principles through meditation, prayers, Chong Krom pacing therapy, Qigong aerobics, music and nature therapy and 4. Provide transfer service for critical patients to hospitals. The healthcare personnel at the temple include Phra Paponpatchara Jiratham the abbot of Wat Khampramong working together with doctors, nurses, pharmacists and public health volunteers. The herbal medicine remedy for cancer treatment at the temple was created by Phra Paponpatchara Jiratham during meditation in 2003. The complementary treatment at Wat Khampramong Temple provided opportunities for both the patient and their family to participate in religious activities at the temple and they also receive spiritual treatment which is an important factor affecting both the patients' physical and mental fitness. The Buddhist prayers and sermons help create the proper and correct environment for patients in terminal situations and will lessen the impact of the fear of dying so that the patients are at peace. The complementary treatment also provides the patient with the strength to face the reality of death and live their final moments in peace and happiness.

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Introduction

Wat Khampramong is located in Tambon Sawang, Amphoe Phanna Nikhom in Sakon Nakhon Province. The Buddhist temple is a complementary healthcare center for cancer patients that integrates Thai traditional herbal medicine and modern medical practices. Phra Paponpatchara Jiratham, the abbot of the temple, invented the herbal cancer remedy called “Yot Mareng” (cancer apex) which is derived from an ancient Thai cancer remedy called “Phet Nam Nueng”. Phra Paponpatchara Jiratham, first tried the Yot Mareng remedy on himself to treat his maxillary sinus cancer and through continued treatment of his cancer through Yot Mareng was successful and he is now cancer free. Phra Paponpatchara Jiratham created the Thai Herbal Nursing Center at Wat Khampramong Temple and initial care for late stage cancer patients in 2003 and would later become the temple’s Arokhayasarn hospice in 2005, providing palliative care to late stage cancer patients. The temple’s Arokhayasarn hospice still continues to offer cost free palliative care to cancer patients up to the present-day (Khampramong, 2019). The center does not reject modern medical practices or treatment but the primary cancer treatment at the temple relies on the Yot Mareng herbal remedy. The patient’s relatives participate in providing nursing care and support the medical team and healthcare volunteers at the temple. Patients travel to the hospice from close and far communities in Thailand and from abroad. The main factors for their decision to come to the hospice as established by Poonthananiwatkul et al. (2015) include a positive attitude towards herbal medicines and their own previous use of them, dissatisfaction with conventional treatment, the home environment and poor relationships with hospital doctors. There have been more than 5,200 cancer patients tended at Wat Khampramong since 2003 which includes Thai citizens and foreign patients. The treatment is without clause and provided to everyone, free of cost. The temple relies on donations for funding and donations have surpassed more than 100 million baht in 2016. The continued success and popularity of palliative cancer treatment through complementary methods at Wat Khampramong has provided an alternative and supplemental treatment. Success and acceptance of complementary/alternative medicine has increasingly become popular for cancer treatment (Richardson et al., 2016; Cassileth & Chapman, 1996; Tascilar et al., 2006). The research is therefor aimed to document the origin, practices and cultural format of

Thai traditional healthcare in the Buddhist temple, Wat Khampramong, to study the cultural format of Thai traditional healthcare through herbal medicine which offers benefits to patients, and to add to the knowledge and practicality of complementary cancer treatment to communities in Thailand and abroad.

Materials and methods

The research was conducted between April 2015 and September 2016. Qualitative methodology was applied which focused on the origin, Thai traditional healthcare practices and activities at Wat Khampramong in Sakon Nakhon Province.

The population and research informants consist of 25 individuals. Key informants include 3 individuals who are experienced traditional healthcare practitioners and licensed nursing professionals at Wat Khampramong. Casual informants included 7 individuals. 1 individual is the supervisor of the Thai traditional healthcare treatment, 1 individual from the pharmaceutical at the temple and 5 volunteer caregivers at the temple. General informants include 15 former patients and family caregivers at the temple.

The research tools included basic surveys to gather information on the basics of the Thai traditional healthcare at the temple, participatory and non-participatory observation forms were utilized during joint activities with the sampling group to record information on the format and detailed practices of Thai traditional healthcare at the temple. Structured interviews and non-structured interview forms were used to collect data on the origin and background of the Thai traditional healthcare and the activities and the processes involved in nursing and caring for patients. Focus group discussions were recorded during data collection, questioning and interviews with the research informants to debate and discuss the research findings and to also exchange knowledge on the cultural format of Thai traditional healthcare applied at the temple. The research findings from field research and data from document analysis from documents and published papers were verified through data triangulation.

Results

Wat Khampramong is recognized for palliative care and nursing of late stage cancer patients through complementary treatment which consists of 4 methods:

1. Modern medical treatment by licensed nurses who perform weekly blood samplings of cancer patients.
2. Treatment by alternative methods, cancer treating herbal medicine, acupuncture and nutritional therapy.
3. Utilizing Buddhism principles through meditation, prayers, Chong Krom pacing therapy, Qigong Aerobics, music and nature therapy and 4. Provide transfer service for critical patients to hospitals. The healthcare officials at the temple include Phra Paponpatchara Jiratham, the abbot of Wat Khampramong working together with doctors, nurses, pharmacists and public health volunteers. Herbal medicine treatment at the temple was crafted by Phra Paponpatchara Jiratham during meditation that resulted in the hospice's herbal medicine remedy for cancer called "Yot Mareng" (cancer apex). The Yot Mareng cancer remedy was based on the herbal medicine remedy called "Phet Nam Nueng" which is derived from a basic herbal remedy described in Treatises on Thai traditional medicine and Pharmacognosy book. The Yot Mareng herbal remedy ingredients are boiled with water and portioned down to 250 milliliter doses for cancer patients to take before breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Wat Khampramong cancer treatment procedures

1. Types of cancer patients that are accepted
 - 1.1 Final stage cancer that has been terminally diagnosed through modern medicine such as liver cancer or gall bladder cancer patients.
 - 1.2 Cancer patients that desire to extend their Thai traditional treatment.
 - 1.3 Cancer patients who prefer Thai traditional treatment.
 - 1.4 Patients who are at risk of cancer such as individuals who are infected with Hepatitis B.
 - 1.5 Patients who cannot afford the cost of modern medical facilities.
2. Patient preparation
 - 2.1 The patient or relative must submit their medical records such as: biopsy, blood parameters, cancer tissue count, surgical records, chemotherapy records, x-rays, MRI, CT scan or ultrasound.
 - 2.2 The patient must have at least 1 caregiver such as a relative who can assist them during their treatment at the temple.
 - 2.3 Patients must notify the staff if they have any congenital diseases and also prepare their own medicine for any congenital diseases they might have. They must also alert the staff to their allergies, food or medicine that they are allergic too.

3. Items that the patient must bring with them.

- 3.1 Set of cooking pots with handles that is appropriate for boiling or warming herbal remedy prescribed by the temple. The pots are a necessity, because the patient is responsible for warming their herbal medicine before taking it on a daily basis at the temple and also at home.

- 3.2 Patients are encouraged to stay at least 2 weeks for their treatment so that they may understand and replicate the treatment at their residence.

- 3.3 Relatives or friends who are accompanying the patient should be healthy and strong enough to help patients through exercises, help with the preparation of the herbal medicine, food preparation and also understand the treatment and practices that are to be performed at their residence.

Thai traditional cancer treatment

1. The orientation process is a necessary step in helping patients and their relatives to understand the constraint and purpose of the temple's Thai traditional nursing. Patients that are too frail to complete the schedule, must rely on relatives or friends that accompany them as family caregivers (Table 1).

Table 1 Wat Khampramong Healthcare treatment schedule

Morning Session	
7:00 a.m.	Patients and relatives are opted to participate in alms giving, meditation and breathing practices and attend Buddhist sermons.
8:00 a.m.	New patients will receive appointments for herbal remedy detoxification that is in accordance with the patient's essence through Traditional Thai Healthcare classifications.
8:30 – 11:00 a.m.	Measurement of fever temperature, blood pressure and heart rate readings, diagnosis and receive medication.
Afternoon - Evening Session	
19:00 – 22:00 p.m.	Meditation and prayer training, receive herbal medicine, receive medication as prescribed by visiting doctors, receive appointments for approved herbal remedy detoxification, receive appointment on how to make and prepare herbal cures.

2. Verification of the patient's condition and treatment is based on Buddhism and is part of the complementary healthcare treatment which integrates the knowledge and methods of modern medicine and Thai traditional medicine and cultural practices. The complementary healthcare treatment is a supplementary treatment which will provide cancer patients with the most benefits and is focused on the mind, social and spirit. The goal of the temple is to provide holistic care for treating the patient's

illness and also activities and knowledge that will enable the patient and relatives to emulate and continue the treatment practices if they have to return home.

3. Wat Khampramong cancer treatment and healthcare activities is as follows:

3.1 Prayers: Prayers is the communication between an individual and a higher power as according to an individual's religious belief. Buddhist will pray in remembrance of the Buddha. Christians pray to the Holy Spirit and Muslims pray to Allah. Prayer activities at Wat Khampramong is open to patients of different worships and together they perform prayers of their worship together in the morning and evening. The activity is not segregated and there is also an area allocated for those who are not bound by religious belief to meditate during the prayers in peace.

3.2 Meditation: Meditation therapy at Wat Khampramong is for cancer patients to learn how to meditate and gain hope, how to walk and meditate through the Doen Chong Krom pacing technique, teach how to regularly perform Charoen Mora Na Nu Sati prayers (remembrance of death). The treatment techniques through mediation are to create an understanding of the cycle of life and to accept the changes in life from birth, aging, sickness and death. Accepting the truth of the eventuality of death is the beginning of mental health treatment so the mind is at peace. This is necessary for terminal cancer patients to have strength to live in peace and in consciousness for the remainder of their life. Cancer patients are directly taught by Phra Paponpatchara Jiratham in which the abbot teaches to pray for hope through a sermon called Thamma 9 Nathi Kon Tai (9 minute prayer before dying). The Thamma 9 Nathi Kon Tai sermon, teaches oneself to be in constant relevance of death and not underestimate the importance of life.

3.3 Exercise: Cancer patients are suggested to perform light exercises that they are physically capable of and include flexible activities with a duration of 15-30 minutes each. These exercise include such as yoga, body exercises and Thai qigong. Qigong exercises is a holistic system of coordinated body posture and movement, breathing, and meditation used for the purposes of health, and spirituality.

3.4 Art Therapy: Art therapy was derived from the idea that the creative process in making art will nourish and create a self-healing process, promoting a higher quality of life (Cutler et al., 2011). The treatment is utilized at the temple to nurse the patient's feeling and help them to understand themselves. Art therapy is

affective in removing negative thoughts and feelings. The elimination of negativity from the body will open up the mind to change and creativity, leading to a more focused meditation and relaxation of the mind.

3.5 Laughing Therapy: Laughing therapy is a group treatment at Wat Khampramong which helps to elevate the mood and feelings of patients and their relatives. Voluntary laughter or forced laughter is a mind exercise and is an important part in social bonding (Kataria, 2002).

3.6 Music Therapy: Music therapy affects the physical and mental health of patients and can be used together with medical treatment. Music therapy is affective against pain, lowering anxiety and fear, increase motor functions and entices consciousness, thoughts, and feelings promoting a healthy spirit.

3.7 Nutrition: Nutrition therapy at Wat Khampramong for cancer patients focuses on a healthy nutritional diet that is flexible and appropriate to the condition of the patient. Patients are given simple suggestions towards nutritional habits that include both suggested and prohibited foods and nourishments while receiving treatment. Prohibited foods include protein from meats, frogs, turtles, ray fish, ducks, geese, bird eggs, fermented fish, fermented shrimp, pickled fish, fermented sour sausages, pickled crabs, sea crabs, sea foods, crustaceans, beef, buffalo meat, fish organs, pickled seafood, chicken eggs, dairy products, animal fats, sweet fruits, jack fruit, longan, durian, banana, sapodilla plum, coconut milk or cream, whitened or polished rice, white sugar, watermelons, coconut, bamboo shoots, cucumbers, piper sarmentosum leaves, guava's, green beans, mung beans, peanuts, soybeans, tofu, mushrooms, sesame oil, soybean oil, flavorings and spices with preservatives, seasoning powder with monosodium glutamate, fish sauce, shrimp paste, pickled vegetables, food coloring, tea, coffee, sweetened birds nest, chicken extracts and malt coco drinks. Suggestions also extends to the use of utensils, prohibiting the use of aluminum and plastics pots and pans. Patients and their relatives are supported in using cookware and using utensils made from earthenware, stainless steel, enamelware and wood. Foods that should be eaten include proteins from garden peas, sprouts, cow-peas, string beans, fresh vegetables, fresh fruits that are not too sweet, and vegetable juice. Vegetable and fruits should be submerged in water with activated charcoal to absorb toxins from the vegetables and fruits.

3.8 Continual Care: Wat Khampramong keeps in contact and extend their nursing care to patients even after they have left the temple. Most patients stay for the

minimal requirement of two weeks for their treatment and are allowed to go home after they have recuperated. Temple staff and volunteers maintain contact through social media channels, email, internet or communicate through the telephone. The continued nursing and advice promotes good relationships between the temple, volunteers, patients and their relatives to get the best care and advice for their treatment.

3.9 Symptoms Management: Symptoms management at Wat Khampramong is focused on relieving physical and mental pain induced from nausea, vomiting and food boredom which are addressed through Buddhist dharma and complementary treatment. Meditation principles are directed at lowering stress and fear in the mind to make both mental and physical aspects of the body to be at peace. Using Dharma and meditation in healthcare treatment is a current trend that is affective, cost saving and creates no additional physical complications or side effects. The effectiveness of self help in dealing with pain through the Buddhist principle of Ariyatsat Si (the four truths) can lower pain in cancer patients that have been through chemotherapy.

3.10 Spiritual Care: Spiritual treatment is essential and affects the mental and physical health of an individual. Spiritual treatment at Wat Khampramong is carried out through religious activities. Buddhist activities include giving alms, water pouring ceremony to offer kindness and compassion to karma. Learning how to boil or make the Yot Mareng herbal remedy is a part of the spiritual remedy and a mandatory activity for all new cancer patients and their family caregiver. Making the herbal remedy is an important process of the cancer treatment at Wat Khampramong and serves the purpose so that the patient's family can replicate the process back at home through delivered ingredients of the herbal remedy in which they will receive from the temple. Additional spiritual treatment include a written confession of their sins that they have done in the past. The confessions are handed directly to Phra Paponpatchara Jiratham before a sermon and prayers are performed. The confessions must include a recollection of their feelings and lingering regrets that they have not told anyone else such as, attempted suicides, theft, abortions, and abuses.

Discussion

The holistic approach to cancer treatment at Wat Khampramong encompasses physical treatment, modern medical practices, Thai traditional medicine, mental and

social treatment and spiritual healing. Treatment through traditional herbal medicine requires the patient to drink the Yot Mareng cancer remedy which is used to adjust the body's equilibrium and strengthen the body's natural immunizing agents. The Yot Mareng remedy will also adjust the body's elemental factors. Mental exercises such as laughing therapy is used to nurture a strong mental fitness. Laughter can help patients cope with cancer by reducing the psychological impact of cancer patients' experiences and shift perspective on a stressful situation (Kuiper et al., 1993). Laughter also decreases serum levels of cortisol, epinephrine, growth hormone, and 4-dihydrophenylacetic acid, indicating a reversal of the stress response (Yim, 2016). A variety of physical exercise at the temple include yoga and Qigong aerobics. Qigong aerobics is also the most recommended aerobic exercise for coronary artery disease and can significantly reduce systolic and diastolic blood pressure (Xiong et al., 2015) and has physiological effects that indicate stabilization of cardiovascular system (Zhao et al., 2018). Volunteer groups also provide supplementary physical fitness activities such as painting and music courses to support the patient's physical rehabilitation. Cancer patients that have undergone chemotherapy are particularly vulnerable to depression and anxiety. Art Therapy can substantially help cancer patients cope and reduce depression (Bar-Sela et al., 2007). Nutritional diets include programs such as, giving up meats, limiting the consumption of dairy products, soymilk, yogurts, egg yolk, vegetable oil, concentrated fats, deep fried foods, seasonings and fruits with high concentration of sugar. The temple also has an in-house garden that grows hydroponic vegetables that are made available to the patients and their families to use in their cooking. Nutritional therapy is also a prominent treatment in Chiang Mai province (Khattiya, 2006), because tribal communities in Northern Thailand believe that many illness and disease stem from improper foods and eating habits. Similar results were also observed by Chimsut (1998), where villagers in rural Tak province believed that nutrition was one of three main causes of illnesses along with physical and supernatural causes.

Mental and social treatments at the temple include, meditation, performing prayers and Chong Krom pacing remedy. These treatments help patients to realize and be mindful of their health and to understand and accept the cycle of life. The social treatments are just as important as the physical treatments which are necessary in helping patients to be aware about the changes to their life and

accept the final stages, which are illness and death. Meditation creates empathy and nurture building good relationships with others. Meditation will also help lower high blood pressure and lower high heart rates. Meditation is knowledge and is the root of knowledge. Meditation creates mental and spiritual freedom, lowers anxiety, leading to a healthy body and mind (Wasi, 2009) and the mental fitness and health of Buddhist practitioners is higher in those who regularly practiced meditation (Moore & Malinowski, 2009). The majority of patients and their spouses were satisfied with the cancer treatment and palliative care at Wat Khampramong (Piew-on, 2011) and they also confirmed that they felt physically better and could eat more food. Consistent results were confirmed by Poonthananiwatkul et al., (2016), that cancer patients reported a significant reduction in symptoms after their stay at the hospice. Many patients have left the temple feeling more pleasant and were not as stressed as before. Terminal patients were able to embrace their fate and were content to live as long as they can and be at peace for the remainder of their lives. The social aspect of healthcare at the temple plays an important part for patients and relatives in coping with their illness and condition with a clear mindset. The mental and social treatments focuses on the positive useful of life and encourages patients not to be mentally tormented by their condition and fate. Patients and their relatives are provided with the opportunity to share and discuss their experiences with others. The surrounding environment and lodgings are adjusted to resemble the patient's home as much as possible. Patients and relatives are provided with opportunities to participate in alms offerings to Buddhist monks and participate in the water pouring ceremony. An important social treatment is to have terminal patients, their relatives and friends exchange their final farewells to each other and forgive each other with Dharma prayers performed in the background.

Conclusion

The treatment at Wat Khampramong provide opportunities for the patient and their family to participate in religious activities at the temple and also prayers according to their individual beliefs. Buddhist practitioners can participate in merit making through alms offerings and water pouring ceremonies to wish happiness to karma. Brewing and boiling herbal medicine is mandatory for all new patients and is crucial step that patients and

relatives know how to produce and duplicate the herbal medicine at home through ingredients distributed from the temple to their homes. During the brewing process, the patient is instructed to confess their sins through their written biography and confession. The patient's biography must detail the immoralities and regrets that they still have. Patients are encouraged to write down truths that they cannot tell others such as, abortions, attempted suicide and murder. The biography is followed by the Bangsakul prayer hymns to renounce past sins. The acknowledgment of sins and prayers for forgiveness is essential for cancer patients. Patients are trained to be prepared and face death through acknowledgement and sermons from Phra Paponpatchara Jiratham, the abbot of Wat Khampramong. The prayers and sermons, help create the proper and correct environment in terminal situations and will lessen the impact of the fear of dying so that the patients are at peace. The treatment is also to provide the patient with the strength to face the reality of death and final moments in peace and happiness, which in Buddhist terms is called tai dee (a good death). Complementary healthcare is essential for terminal cancer treatment at Wat Khampramong. The treatment and care at the temple followed by continual treatment at their residence in supporting the patient until their death so that they can die with dignity is crucial for modern society. The testimonials from the majority of patients and relatives at Wat Khampramong have all looked for alternative options when they are told by hospitals that the disease is in the terminal stages. Cancer treatment through modern medicine is very effective and is the primary choice, but when the disease is in the final stages, many patients are left with limited options and the complementary treatment at Wat Khampramong is a better alternative than just solely transporting the patient to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and wait for their passing.

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