

Alternative Health for Holistic Care

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Abstract

Health care reforms, including health insurance reform and universal coverage, are being driven by the people in Thailand to decrease costs, enhance quality, and expand access. Alternative health indicates, not only cost effectiveness, but also high quality of care. It is a fully-integrated holistic care which is composed of body, mind, and spirit. The best approach is the softest and gentlest care that avoids dangerous and traumatic procedures. Alternative health is categorized into seven fields of practice, namely: (i) herbal medicine, (ii) diet and nutrition, (iii) mind/body intervention, (iv) alternative system of medical practice, (v) manual healing method, (vi) bio-electric, magnetic and pharmacology, and (vii) biologic treatment. However, the evaluation - safety, affordability, need and efficacy - is very important for decision-making to choose any appropriate alternative health.

Keywords: *Alternative health, holistic care, herbal medicine, diet and nutrition, mind/body intervention, alternative system of medical practice, manual healing method, bio-electric, magnetic and pharmacology, and biologic treatment.*

Introduction

In the globalization era, the development of medical and health technology as well as epidemiological transition has contributed to use of expensive and high-technology medical equipment in the Thai health system. More complex procedures for diagnosis and curative care have been introduced from abroad. Such imports increased considerably during the bubble-economy period and this increase discontinued as soon as the economic crisis erupted. However, imports and use of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machines in Thailand between 1988 and 1999 have increased dramatically (Fig.1). It should be noted that imported medical equipment and expensive technology are not only costly, but also encourage over consumption (Ministry of Public Health 2000).

Besides, most of the medical and health technologies, particularly high-tech medical devices, are clustered in large cities, mostly in the private sector (Fig. 2).

Furthermore, it was found that in 1998, there were 5.21% GDP or about Baht 284,000 million spent on health. The rate had risen significantly during the past decade and also much higher than other Asian countries (Table 1).

The above situation indicates the failure of using cost-benefit and safety analysis equipment (Ministry of Public Health 1998). Therefore, effective mechanism should be set up to promote discriminatory use of health products and technologies in both modern medicine and alternative health, in particularly, alternative health such as traditional healing and herbal therapy. It is not only costly but also non-invasive and potentially toxic.

What is Alternative Health?

Alternative health is not new. It represents a return to the principles that have been a part of human understanding of health and disease for thousands of years. It is vast and used around the world. For example acupuncture and herbal medicine have been used in China for mainstream care; and in India, Ayurvedic