

Conference of Healers: Traditional African Medicine

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Presented by

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Definition

African Traditional medicine is a holistic discipline that utilizes indigenous herbalism combined with some aspects of African spirituality.

- Traditional diviners are practitioners of witchcraft -- determine cause of illness (ancestral spirits). Good health, disease, success and misfortune not seen as chance occurrence.

(Continued)

Definition

- Traditional herbal medicines (Herbalists) are popular in Africa and replete with herb trading market
- Midwives --- use indigenous plants to aid childbirth.

Training of Healers

- No formal education needed. Most are illiterates by Western Education
- Learnt trade by undergoing treatment themselves, undergoes some rites (paying fees or paying bride prizes) and shown the medicinal roots, leaves, etc by the primary healer.

Training of Healers

- Spiritual Calling (Supernatural powers).
- Learnt through close family member as a succession plan (Father to Son; Mother to daughter etc).

Therapeutic Range

African Medicine man claim to cure or abate these conditions: cancers, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), mental illness, high blood pressure, cholera, infertility, malaria, venereal diseases, epilepsy, migraine headache, asthma, eczema, hay fever, benign prostatic hypertrophy, urinary tract infections, gout, and healing of wounds, fixing of broken bones and burns.

Preamble to Healing

- Psycho- Spiritual aspects to traditional African medical practice (igba Afa Ibos of Nigeria).
- Gift of healing bestowed on Practitioner by his ancestors and God.
- Emphasis placed on determining root cause because underlying any sickness or bad luck.

Sources of African Traditional Medication

- African rain forest rich in medicinal wild Fauna and aromatic flora.
- Flora of Africa is endemic for that continent.
- Diviners use plants and animal parts for healing purposes or control weather and events.
- Other Healing tools include: charms, incantations, and casting of spells

Sources of African Traditional Medication



**Medicinal plants grown in bags for herbalists.
(TDRC Photo: Peter Bennett)**

Importance of African Traditional Healers (ATH) in Meeting unmet medical needs

- Venda area of South Africa, there is one ATH for 700-1,200 people.
- Kwahu areas of Ghana, one ATH for 224 people
- Swaziland has one traditional healer for every 110 people.

Importance of African Traditional Healers (ATH) in Meeting unmet medical needs

- Benin City, Nigeria has one traditional healer for every 110 people.
- Urban Kenya has one traditional healer per 833 populations.
- Compared to one western-trained physician for every 10,000 - 20,000 people throughout the African continent.

Lack of Conservation and continuity of Tradition

- Indiscriminate Harvesting of wild medicinal plants used is endangering local plant populations.
- Endangered Animals (elephants because of tusks, some species of snakes (snake fat -- Abuba eke)).
- Species are not being replenished as they are removed

Lack of Conservation and continuity of Tradition

- \$220 million annual market for *Prunus Africana* as a prostrate remedy could lead to extinction of the slow-maturing evergreen tree in the African wilds.
- Church officials express opposition to elements of witchcraft hence the Art is fast dying.

Therapeutic Outcomes

- The treatment outcomes are for the most part testimonials.
- African patient taking herbal infusion expects benefits from the ingredients & the power of ancestors invoked.
- Spiritual significance more important to them than biological properties of remedy.

Conclusion

- African Traditional Medicine assisted generations of Africans to maintain good Health and psychological wellbeing. Treatments have been effective for variety of specific conditions such as Malaria, migraine headache etc.

Word of Caution

- Serious side effects, even death, can result from incorrect identification of healing plants. For example, species of the aloe plants are extensively used in traditional African medicine, but some forms, such as *Aloe globuligemma*, are toxic and can result in death if misidentified.