

Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Sri Lanka: A Study with Special Reference in the Field of Indigenous Medicine

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Indigenous knowledge, formulated by indigenous people or aboriginal tribes has been handed down from generation to generation for hundreds and thousands of years. Indigenous knowledge is a local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. Hence, it can be measured according to the measurements of the same culture itself. The earliest system of medicine that originated or was inherited by people who lived in Sri Lanka before the advent of Ayurveda, was indigenous medicine. This system was handed down from generation to generation, and has a long tradition with its roots traced back to pre Aryan civilization. This study aimed to explore the major information methods used in the system of indigenous medical field in Sri Lanka and how it transmitted this knowledge from generation to generation. The major research tools employed for data gathering were interviews, questionnaires and observation. Indigenous medical practitioners from two districts of Anuradhapura and Colombo were deemed as the study population. From this medical population, three practitioners were selected purposively from each and every ten broad categories of indigenous medicine ie. KedumBidumVedakam (Local orthopaedics), GedievanaPilika (Treatment of abscesses and tumors), DavumPilissumVedakama (Treatment of burns), VishaVedakama (Treatment in toxicology), EsVedakama (Ophthalmology), ManasikaRogaVedakama (Psychiatry), Balaroga (Padiatrics), PinasRogaVedakama, VathaRogaVedakama and SamanyaSarvanga (Internal Medicine).

The study revealed that both of verbal and non – verbal methods are equally used to collect, record, transmit and preserve the indigenous medical knowledge in Sri Lanka. Among them Vedageta, DuthaLakshana, Incantations (Yanthra – Manthra), and Rituals (Yathu Karma) are the major verbal methods used and ola leaf manuscripts, hand written manuscripts and methods of kem are the major non – verbal methods involved. This study highlights that the ‘Generational succession’ is the main method of transformation of indigenous medical knowledge and relevant expertise to the next generation.

Keywords: *Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous Medicine, Information Resources, Information transmission, Dissemination of Knowledge*