

Community-Based Health Care Systems

The Inter-Relationship Between Codified Traditional Medical Doctors and Informal Medical Practitioners in Southern India

Thursday 27 May, 2021

13:30-15:00



Zoom link

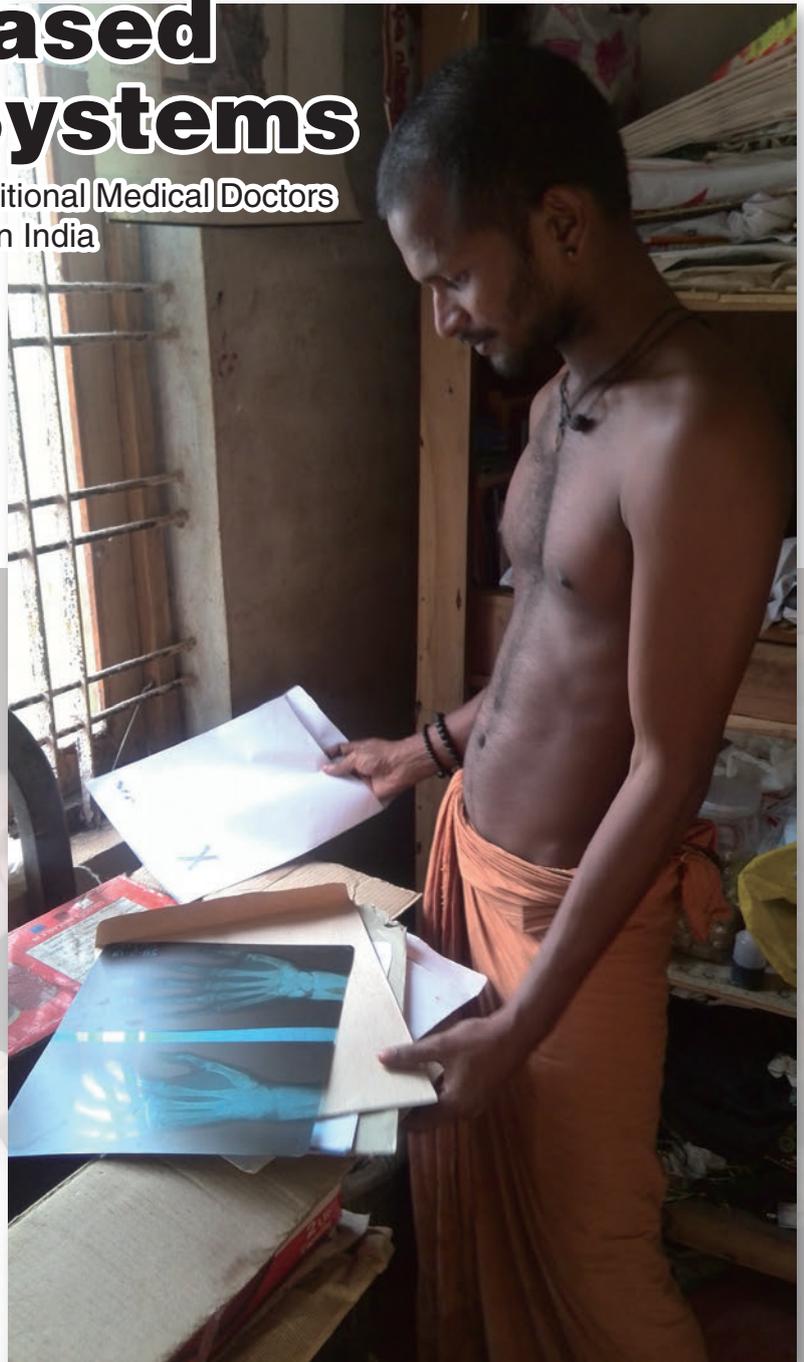
<https://kyoto-u-edu.zoom.us/j/82287875218?pwd=ZNjdCOWdiUkZjbE11L2RIRGdnQjFOQT09>

This presentation examines the inter-relationship between codified traditional medical doctors and informal medical practitioners, called Vaidya, in Southern India where health indicators are on par with those in developed countries. It aims to clarify the roles of informal medicine for modern Indian communities through methodologies that include geographical, historical, and medical systems reviews as well as ethnographic observations of medical practices and analyses of patients' treatment-seeking behaviors through long-term fieldwork.

In India, a variety of medical systems including traditional medical systems such as Ayurveda and Siddha have been registered as codified medical systems and each have public medical institutions in India. Yet, there also exist informal medical systems. Under community health, Vaidyas practitioners have not been studied to the same degree as informal ones, rather they have been perceived as traditional medical systems or those that provide ethnobotanical knowledge. While previous studies have reported that Vaidyas are less used by people including those in urban areas, this presentation will show that patients visit Vaidyas from outside of villages. Vaidyas offer options for certificated doctors who are exploring the true nature of better treatments. Yet, codified traditional medicine offers income opportunities to Vaidyas.

This finding implies that even under frequent contact between different cultures, people's treatment-seeking behavior and the role of informal medicine can change depending on cultural and social contexts, even though medicinal effects are proven through scientific research. Such a phenomenon supports a "medical pluralism" that can provide treatment options to community members. This presentation will show that informal medicine possesses multifunctional quality for communities.

As a variety of traditional medical systems have been spreading globally in response to issues such as ongoing population aging, medical pluralism may diversify through individual preferences. This presentation will argue that policy for community health needs to multilaterally consider the usefulness of non-codified medicines as medical resources not only in rapidly transforming India, but also in other developed countries.



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Sachi Matsuoka is a researcher at the Center for Southeast Asian studies at Kyoto University, who started out as a clinical pharmacist before becoming a project coordinator for human-grassroots security projects granted by the Japanese Government on health and education issues in West Africa. After a career in the health and community sector, she entered academia questioning how human societies support (and are supported) considering the diversity of hope for life and death. Her current research topics include informal medicine, religious practices, and social services examining the relationship between formal and informal care. She has conducted qualitative and quantitative case studies in Kerala, Southern India along the lines of medical anthropology-based interdisciplinary studies.