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Traditional methods of knowledge transfer and acquisition with special reference to indigenous knowledge of indigenous medicine in Sri Lanka

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Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is considered a country's national heritage. Indigenous medicine refers to local health care systems that have been practised by the local communities in many countries for thousands of years. The system encompasses plants, animals and minerals-based medicines, spiritual therapies, rituals and astrology. The Indigenous medical system is not only a healing system but also a lifestyle that teaches people to manage their lives and associated flora and fauna. Sri Lanka is a country rich in IK. The indigenous medical system of the country is referred to as 'Deshiya Chikitsa', 'Sinhala Vedakama' or 'Hela Vedakama,' which is very popular, especially among rural communities. The main objective of this study was to explore existing methods of knowledge transfer and acquisition in Sri Lanka on indigenous medicine. The qualitative method was employed for this study. Selected indigenous medical practitioners were the study population, and data collection was done through a documentary survey and interviews. It was identified that IK in indigenous medicine remains in tacit and explicit forms. Acquisition of IK of indigenous medicine is predominantly local and individual. 85% is from parents or family, and the rest is through institutional education and practicing as an apprentice under a reputed traditional indigenous medical practitioner. Indigenous medical practitioners have acquired knowledge mainly from their forefathers. Apprentices acquire IK while practicing with their masters. Practitioners who serve with spiritual power claim to have acquired power from invisible agents or developed by themselves. The views of the respondents about the transfer of their indigenous medical knowledge to the next generation can be summarized as follows. Some only share within the family members through learning, demonstration, observation, and practice. Some may transfer to a nonrelative who is interested and reliable. Some believe that the knowledge cannot be transferred, but the interested persons must grasp it. The rest believe that the knowledge cannot be transferred at all because they treat their knowledge as their own or family heritage. Their perception is that the spiritual power cannot be transferred.

Keywords: Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous Medicine, Knowledge Acquisition, Knowledge Transfer, Sri Lanka

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