



Introduction

Traditional medicine (TM) has been a cornerstone of healthcare in Africa, used to treat a wide range of ailments long before the introduction of Western medicine. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that Kenya has <u>19</u> healthcare practitioners per **100,000** people. In a healthcare system already burdened by high demand, escalating costs, and the adverse effects of conventional treatments, along with growing concerns about drug resistance, TM has emerged as a vital alternative in Kenya.

Traditional Medicine Practitioners (TMP) thus play a crucial role in healthcare delivery, especially in areas with limited access to Western Medical Services (WMS). This project highlights the importance of TMPs in the cancer care continuum in Kenya. By informing public health policies and fostering collaboration between TMPs and Western Medical Practitioners (WMPs), we aim to improve early cancer detection, reduce delays in treatment, and enhance patient outcomes in Kenya. Implementing targeted educational programs for TMPs could play a key role in advancing these goals. The findings from this initiative are expected to influence future healthcare strategies and inspire further research in this critical area.

Background

Cancer is a leading global cause of death, responsible for nearly 10 million deaths in 2020, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). In Kenya, approximately 47,000 new cases are recorded annually, with 46% diagnosed at an advanced stage. Many patients discontinue treatment to pursue traditional medicine (TM), often returning when the disease is too advanced for curative care.

This project was prompted by cases in government hospitals in Kitui and Eldoret, where patients initially lost to follow-up later returned with late-stage cancer. The goal is to determine how many sought TM, assess its impact, and evaluate whether delays in conventional treatment led to worse outcomes.





Enhancing Early Cancer Detection and Treatment through Traditional Medicine Practitioners in Kenya Minneh Oyas, PharmD^{1,2}; Daniel Abazia, PharmD, BCPS¹; Ornesha Watson, PharmD²; Christabel Semondile²

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Objectives

Figure 1: TMP outside her lab

Figure 2: Ground herbs and roots

This quality improvement project aimed to: Assess the impact of TMPs on delays in cancer diagnosis and treatment.

- Evaluate TMP diagnostic methods, treatment decisions, and referral patterns.
- Determine their influence on timely cancer care.
- Explore TMPs' willingness to collaborate with WMPs to enhance patient outcomes.

Methods

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to TMPs. These questionnaires evaluated TMPs' knowledge of cancer diagnosis, treatment, and referral processes. Secondary data analysis was conducted on de-identified medical records of cancer patients from Kitui County Referral Hospital and Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital. The project also analyzed patterns of patient care delays and identified gaps in TMPs' understanding of cancer management.

Surveyed seven (7) TPMs and six (6) WMPs in Kitui and Eldoret. Reviewed de-identified medical records at the two hospitals.

- Collected anecdotal accounts from family members of a patient undergoing traditional medicine (TM) therapy for a liver mass while concurrently undergoing blood tests and screening at Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital in Eldoret.



Figure 3: Chairperson of TMP Association teaching on their evaluation processes



Figure 4: TMP demonstrating how she diagnoses

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Figure 5: Que read out and

	anal Madicina Practitionar Quartionnaire
1.	Demographics:
	a. Age
	b. Tribe
	c. How long have you been practicing?
2.	How did you begin practicing?
_	a. Did you have formal training?
3.	How do you diagnose Cancer?
	a. What does it look like when you examine the patient? Symptoms?
	b. How do you determine how far along your patient is in the cancer prognosis? Do
	you stage the cancer, I, II, III, IV?
	c. Can you give an example of a patient case you have seen before?
4.	How do you determine treatment for Cancer specifically?
	a. Do you do any tests?
	 If so, what do those look like?
	b. Do you ever refer patients to hospitals?
	 If so, at what stage?
	c. What are your thoughts on western medicine?
	 Are there things that western medicine and western medicine
	practitioners can do for your patients that you might be limited in?
	 Would you be open to referring patients to hospitals/healthcare practitioners of
	western medicine if you don't currently?
	If you do refer patients, would you be open to referring them earlier?
5.	Please walk me through your timeline for patients diagnosed with cancer, how long
	between review?
6.	Can you tell if the cancer has metastasized?
	a. How?
7.	Do you know of patients who see you and get chemotherapy from the hospitals/clinics?
	a. Are there any who only see you and do not go to the hospitals?
8.	What is your patient survival rate?
9.	Do you do follow-ups for your patients? Any examples?
10	. Do you keep records of patients you have seen?
5:	Questionnaire used to survey TMPs: Questions were
ut a	and verbal responses were recorded.
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Results/Discussion

- patients.

Notably, one patient treated by a TMP for a liver mass saw a reduction from 13 cm at diagnosis to 6cm after 6 months. The patient exclusively uses TM, seeking WMP care only for bloodwork and screenings. The mass has never been confirmed as malignant, as the patient has not undergone a biopsy.
 Table 1: Traditional Medicine Practitioners' Responses to Questionnaire.

тмр	Age	Sex	Years Practicing	Treat Cancer	Review Patients	Refer to Hospital	Formal Training
Kitui 1	80s	F	50	No	Yes	Yes	No - inherited
Nakuru	60s	F	30	Yes, small wounds	Yes, weekly	No – pts healed	No - inherited
Eldoret 1	80s	F	50+	Yes	Yes – depends on ailment	Yes for labs and screening	No – inherited
Eldoret 2	60s	м	25	Yes	Yes – depends on ailment	Yes for labs and screening	Inherited then enhanced with healthcare courses
Eldoret 3	70s	М	10	Yes	No	No	No – inherited
Eldoret 4	60s	М	35	Yes	Yes, weekly	Yes, labs, screening and when complicated	Certificate training course offered for TMs
Eldoret 5	50s	F	20	Yes	Yes, weekly	Yes, labs, screening and when complicated	Certificate training course offered for TMs

Further research is needed on the impact of TMPs on cancer care in Kenya. As cancer has only recently emerged as a significant concern for TMPs—most noting its increase in the last decade—many are still learning how to manage it. This presents an ideal opportunity for targeted education to ensure optimal patient care.

- Lancet Global Health, (9) e1487-e1488.
- the way forward", Scientific African (8).

- No financial relationships to disclose.
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✤ All TMPs surveyed reported diagnosing and treating cancer

Three acknowledged referring complex cases to WMPs, while others regularly referred patients for bloodwork and screenings, adjusting treatments based on kidney and liver function.

All TMPs claimed to have cured cancer patients.

* WMPs in Kitui and Eldoret recognize that patients often seek TM, even those undergoing chemotherapy and radiation.

Eldoret WMPs see this as an opportunity for collaboration, while Kitui WMPs view it as a hindrance to patient care.

Future Direction

References

Boum, Y. et al. 2021, "Traditional healers to improve access to quality health care in Africa", The Gakuya D. et al, 2020, "Traditional medicine in Kenya: Past and current status, challenges, and WHO, International Agency for Research on Cancer Global Cancer Observatory, 2021.

Financial Disclosure

 \succ The authors of this poster have no financial interest in the