

Research Seminars at the Faculty of Traditional Medicine, Khesar Gyalpo University, 2021-2023



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INTRODUCTION

Bhutan is known as the Southern Land of Medicinal Herbs (*Lho Menjong*) which resonates with its actual essence as an embodiment of healing and serenity. Reverberating its profound meaning, Bhutan has been practicing *Sowa Rigpa* (Science of Healing) as a medical therapy to treat, heal, and provide care to the citizens. The practice of Traditional Medicine (TM) in Bhutan dates back centuries and forms an integral part of the national health care system.

The Faculty of Traditional Medicine, Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan provides both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in various TM specialties. Although *Sowa Rigpa* is a synergy of both science and philosophy, there have been only limited sources for fostering evidence-based practices. To lay a foundation for a program that supports research and its significance in enhancing the TM system in Bhutan, a Research Development Committee was instituted under the Traditional Medicine Centre in 2006 [1].

RESEARCH SEMINAR 2021

With a motive to encourage and create a platform of meaningful scientific discourse, the Faculty started conducting research seminars in 2021 as an annual program. This journey of converging diverse ideas,

intellect, and expertise into cognizant resolution through discussions began on 13 May 2021 with the launch of the first Faculty Research Seminar themed, “Exploring New Heights in *Sowa Rigpa*”. During the conference, a series of research findings were presented by the faculty members and students covering various vital issues and topics (Table 1). A randomized controlled study on the effectiveness of *Chingdug*, hot herbal compression, in comparison to diclofenac 1% gel showed that *Chingdug* is as effective as diclofenac gel in relieving non-specific low back pain.

A case series was presented to discuss the use of *Yungwa Zhithang* (curcumin) as a treatment to reduce blood glucose levels. In this study, a patient with type 2 diabetes mellitus was given *Yungwa Zhithang* and monitored for six months which showed a noticeable reduction in fasting and postprandial blood glucose levels [2]. This case study has shown the directions for future researchers to study the efficacy of *Yungwa Zhithang* in reducing blood glucose levels using more rigorous research approaches. Another case study reported that phlebotomy of *Chorgong* (dorsal venous arch) improved the conditions of *Uk-medewa* (asthma) [3].

At this conference, a cross-sectional study on the determinants of academic performance and study habits among the students of the Faculty showed that almost two-thirds of the students required support for good study habits. The study also found that despite poor study habits the academic performance of students was moderate with aggregate scores of 60 – 70% [4]. This research provided the faculty members an overview of the study patterns allowing them to reflect on improving the academic performance of the students.

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RESEARCH SEMINAR 2022

The second Faculty Research Seminar was held on 20 May 2022 with the theme “Fostering a Research Culture in *Sowa Rigpa*”. At the conference, the President of the Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan highlighted the significance of such a conference in transforming *Sowa Rigpa* into an evidence-based medical system and exploring the means for the TM system to complement the national healthcare system.

The Conference discussed three health-related studies and three studies related to social issues (Table 1). A cross-sectional study established that the implication of *Galen Metsa*, a form of moxibustion therapy was effective in the treatment of *Badken maenyam* (dyspepsia). The study implemented the Severity of Dyspepsia Assessment tool to assess the degree of abdominal pain and found that there was a steady decline in the pain score over a period of 30 days [5]. Apart from scientific studies, a literature review provided details on how *Depoen Zhijor* (*Curcuma longa*, *Phyllanthus emblica*, *Tribulus terrestris*, and *Berberine aristata*), a laxative drug is effective in treating *Thripa* (bile disorder) through purgation. The review reported on the pharmacodynamics of the drug in the *Sowa Rigpa* context to the concept of taste, post-digestive taste, and qualities that provide a laxative nature to the drug [6]. A cross-sectional study reported that the majority of TM health pro-

essionals adopt moderate health-promoting lifestyles [7]. Another cross-sectional study reported on the frequency of online gaming addiction among the students of the Faculty [8].

RESEARCH SEMINAR 2023 AND THE WAY FORWARD

The Third Faculty Research Seminar was held on 18 May 2023. The seminar discussed six topics, three were research studies and three were presentations by invited speakers (Table 1). During the seminar, one of the invited speakers discussed on one of the classical concepts in *Sowa Rigpa*, “boiled water stored overnight is not safe for consumption”. An observational in-vitro study found growth of *Staphylococcus* bacteria within 24 hours in boiled water stored at 37 °C, proving the classical concept true [9].

The journey of adopting a research approach in transforming *Sowa Rigpa* into an evidence-based health system in Bhutan has just commenced and will continue to strive towards achieving new heights in the field of *Sowa Rigpa*. In pursuit of making the conference accessible and inclusive, starting in 2024, the Faculty is organizing a national-level conference, opening the platform to all the budding researchers within the country to present and disseminate their research findings.

Through research conferences, the Faculty of Tra-

Table 1. Themes and articles discussed at the Faculty Research Seminar, Faculty of Traditional Medicine, Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan, Thimphu, 2021 – 2023

Year	Themes	Research topic presented
2021	Exploring New Heights in <i>Sowa Rigpa</i>	Comparative study of efficacy and safety between <i>Chingdug</i> and Diclofenac gel in pain management of non-specific low back pain
		Effectiveness of <i>Yungwa zhithang</i> in reducing glucose levels in Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus
		Effectiveness of bloodletting in reducing the symptoms of <i>Ukmedewa</i> (asthma)
2022	Fostering a Research Culture in <i>Sowa Rigpa</i>	Academic performance and study habits of students at the Faculty of Traditional Medicine
		The effectiveness of <i>Galen metsa</i> therapy in treating <i>Badken maenyam</i>
		The potency of <i>Depoen zhijor</i> in <i>Shel</i> therapy indicated for the treatment of <i>Thripa</i>
2023	Translating <i>Sowa-Rigpa</i> into Evidence-Based Healthcare Practice	The health-promoting lifestyles among <i>Sowa Rigpa</i> professionals in Thimphu
		Boiled water stored overnight is not safe for consumption (a conceptual note from <i>Sowa Rigpa</i>): a prospective observational in-vitro analysis

ditional Medicine remains committed to promoting ideas for research, innovation, and discourse on *Sowa Rigpa* with the engagement of all relevant stakeholders and academicians in Bhutan and from countries in the region. The conference not only serves as a platform for discussion but also provides opportunities to establish collaborations with institutions to further academic learning and growth.

9 Singye J & Wangmo P. [Boiled water stored overnight is unsafe for consumption \(conceptual note from Sowa-rigpa\): a pilot prospective observational in-vitro analysis](#). Menjong Sorig J. 2018; 1–8.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable

Consent for publication

Not applicable

Competing interests

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