

IMAGES IN TRADITIONAL MEDICINE



Gold Needle Therapy in Bhutanese Traditional Medicine



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Figure 1. Gold Needle Therapy in Bhutanese Traditional Medicine: (a) Gold Needle used in Traditional Medicine hospitals in Bhutan, (b) Heating the sterilized Gold Needle to red hot using a spirit lamp, (c) Application of the heated Gold Needle at the *Lhensang* point, and (d) Application of *Traden-Serkhab* at the crown point (*Chitsuk*). Photos by Kinley Dorji.

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In *Sowa Rigpa* medicine, precious metals such as gold have traditionally been used as *telpa* for cauterization (*tshuk*) to treat various health conditions. However, due to the relatively large size of *telpa*, which may result in larger wounds and scarring, the Gold Needle (*serkhab*) is believed to have been introduced as a more precise alternative by *Drungtsho Sherab Jorden* in Bhutan. The needle is typically made of high-quality gold and measures approximately 6.5 cm in length and 2 mm in diameter, with a sharp tip,

although variations in shape and size exist [1,2].

It is primarily indicated for phlegm-wind (*drang-lung*) disorders such as indigestion, weak digestive heat, oedema, ascites, tumours, and vertigo, as well as for joint pain, skin diseases, and neurological conditions [1–3]. It may also be used in combination with moxibustion in a technique known as *Tra-den-Serkhab*, which is applied at the crown point.

In practice, the practitioner invokes the Medicine Buddha through prayer and mantra while heating a sterilised gold needle until it becomes red-hot. The needle is then placed on marked therapeutic points, with each point cauterised five times (at the point and in its four cardinal directions) at intervals approximately the size of a barley grain, to achieve an effect comparable to moxibustion and traditional *tel-pa* cauterisation [2]. Immediately following the procedure, patients are encouraged to perform a light exercise by walking a few steps. They are further advised to avoid cold drinks on the same day and to refrain from bathing for at least three days. If clinically indicated, the treatment may be repeated after one week. The therapy is avoided at certain body sites and on specific days of the lunar month, according to the movement of *La* (vital energy). Gold Needle Therapy remains an important modality in Bhutanese Traditional Medicine practice.

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