

Fourteen Medicinal Recipes from Tobi

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Fourteen medicinal recipes were recorded in January 1968 on Tobi Island (Hatohobei) in what is now the Republic of Palau. This project was undertaken at the request of the Director of Palau's Entomology Lab while I was working as a Peace Corps Volunteer on Tobi. Four specimens of each plant mentioned in the recipes were collected. Two sets of the collection were given to the Lab, the other two to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, which provided scientific identification for 15 of the 17 plants used in these recipes.

Three elderly men, long since gone, responded to a request to share their knowledge so that the world at large might benefit. They were Patricio Mohotiho, Aureo Hangeor, and Eusobio Chiheihie. As the following notes from the handwritten report that I submitted to the Entomology Lab should make clear, their response was an act of great generosity.

January 21, 1968: "Held meeting with people to discuss local medicine. Main problem seems to be that medicine, like fishing lore and magic, is very private property. Today, anyone needing medicine for himself or his family goes to whoever is known to possess medicine able to cure his illness. This person, if he agrees to help, then collects and prepares his medicine in secret and administers it. The payment is usually one coconut tree. There are two aspects to this problem: secrecy and payment. The first is made worse by my having to use an interpreter. The people were informed that this was strictly voluntary. The program was re-explained in detail and it was agreed that anyone wishing to help should come to my house starting January 23, 1968 and could nominate their own interpreter."

Those notes reflect the state of my understanding at the time. The "problem" was that many people were reluctant to share their knowledge or, in their terms, to give away their property. For example, medicines were part of a person's estate, property that could be left to heirs as part of their inheritance. That is a good part of the reason, I think, that so many of the 15 or so people known to possess medical knowledge did not participate in this project. The interpreter chosen by each of the three people who did take part was Felix Andrew, the island nurse.

Patricio Mohotiho's Medicines. Patricio Mohotiho learned the following three medicines from his father. They are called Yarsoucher after a man who came to Tobi from Pulo Ana many years ago and taught the people his medicine (he was called Soucher but his real name was Tamalmoch). All the leaves should be collected in the morning while they are still fugh (cold). Many people know about these medicines but Patricio does not think they know how to prepare them.

Patricio Mohotiho's First Recipe: for muscular aches and also "if you carry something heavy and stand up quickly and your back goes crack"

Take
Hochari (*Hernandia sonora* L.), five leaves, very young
Chichi (*Polypodium scolopendria* Burm. f.), ten leaves with berries
Riborot (*Canavalia cathartica* Thou.), ten leaves
Yahoo (*Premna obtusifolia* R. Br.), five leaves

Mix the leaves and pound them.

Mix with the water from two coconuts.

Squeeze the leaves until the coconut water becomes black.

Take the oil made from squeezing the meat from 1/2 of an old coconut (the oil will be white) and mix with other ingredients.

Give to patient to drink.

Patricio Mohotiho's Second Recipe: for victims of a beating or a bad fall

Take Yaho (*Premna obtusifolia* R. Br.), ten leaves
 lhaweri (*Vitex negundo* var. *bicolor* (Willd.) Lam.), ten leaves
 Noar (*Morinda citrifolia* L.), ten leaves

Put leaves together and pound them.

Wrap them in breadfruit leaves.

Put on fire, heat but don't burn.

Spread hot leaves on a mat and have patient sleep on them.

Medicine can also be rubbed directly into skin.

Patricio Mohotiho's Third Recipe: for scabies (Hubuehichichi)

Take Hachereng (*Centella asiatic* (L.) Urg.), ten leaves

Put leaves together and pound them.

Put the leaves in a piece of cloth.

Place the cloth in a young, meatless, green (not red) coconut.

Pull the cloth out and squeeze it back into the coconut. Coconut water will turn green.

Throw away the leaves.

Ask patient to wash off his sores.

Apply oil made from cooked copra.

Be sure patient bathes before medicine (green coconut water) is applied.

Twice a day apply the medicine to the patient's skin. Skin will be stained green.

Aureo Hangeor's Recipes. Aureo Hangeor learned the following eight medicines from his parents.

Aureo Hangeor's First Recipe: for dysentery--fever, diarrhoea with blood (Pahecha)

Take Yaho (*Premna obtusifolia* R. Br.), nine leaves
 Tafach (*Crateva speciosa* Volk.), nine old leaves
 Hawhow (*Erythrina variegata* L.), eight leaves
 Noar (*Morinda citrifolia* L.) seven leaves

Mix leaves and pound them.

Place the leaves in a cloth.

Dip the cloth into the water of two or three young coconuts.

Remove the cloth and squeeze back into the water.

Take meat from one or 1/2 old coconut, put it in a piece of cloth, squeeze the oil into the water mixture, and stir.

Be careful not to get any of the meat into the medicine.

Taste medicine. If too spicy, add more coconut oil.

Give to patient twice a day for three days.

Aureo Hangeor's Second Recipe: for gonorrhoea--painful urine and pus

Take Yaho (*Premna obtusifolia* R. Br.), nine old leaves
 Tafach (*Crateva speciosa* Volk.), nine old leaves

Hawhow (*Erythrina variegata* L.), nine leaves

Mix leaves and pound them.

Place the leaves in a cloth and dip into water from two or three young coconuts.

Squeeze.

Take meat from one or 1/2 old coconut, put in cloth, and squeeze the oil into the coconut water.

Mix and taste. If too spicy, add more coconut oil.

Give the patient the medicine followed by one glass of hot water twice a day until cured.

Aureo Hangeor's Third Recipe: for constipation--pain in abdomen for two or three days without bowel movement

Take Richo is made from Haichi or coconut tree sap (non-alcoholic Tuba). Cooked for two or three days, it becomes yellow, then brown. When it is brown, it is ready to be used and is called Richo.
Yator is the water made from squeezing the fibers of a certain type of mature coconut. It is very sweet. The nut is greenish yellow with brown spots. For this medicine, use two nuts.
Oil made from the dried meat of a mature coconut. First the meat is cut out, then it is left in the sun for about six hours, and then squeezed to make the oil. For this medicine, use one nut.

Mix Richo and Yator.

Pour in coconut oil.

Give to patient to drink; wait one day. If not cured, repeat, then stop treatment.

Patient will have diarrhoea for one day, then be cured.

Aureo Hangeor's Fourth Recipe: for sore throat. Sore throat, Moh, appears mostly in young children. Difficulty in swallowing, tongue and throat coated with white. Not contagious. Usually appears with other symptoms--fever or headache or stomach ache--but can appear alone. Felix treats it with gentian violet on tongue.

Take Taferi Moh (*Achyranthes aspera* L. [identification uncertain]), one handful of leaves.

Pound the leaves and place in a cloth.

Place the cloth in any sweet drink, such as sugar water, and squeeze. The drink will turn blue.

Have the patient put his finger in oil made from cooking the meat from an old coconut and lick it to smooth his tongue.

Have the patient gargle and swallow the drink.

Take three or four fish called Horachi (a small fish three to five inches in length, a flat shape, white with black stripes; lives on reef under rocks; plentiful) and make a soup by boiling it in a mixture of coconut oil and water.

Patient drinks this soup after drinking the first mixture.

Patient should drink both mixture and soup twice a day until cured.

Aureo Hangeor's Fifth Recipe: for eye or ear injuries (no name). For black eye or puncture in the eye or bleeding ear from slap (not an ear ache from swimming).

Take Yaho (*Premna obtusifolia* R. Br.), two young stems
Hanoh (identification uncertain), one handful of large leaves

Chew the leaves and stems.

Using a pipe 18 inches long, blow the air from your mouth.

No saliva or leaves should get into patient's eye or ear.

If an eye is being treated, you should blow across the eye from the nose outward.
If an ear is being treated, one should first blow into the other ear, then the afflicted ear.
Blow softly.
Then blow into the patient's nose.
Treatment only needed once.

Aureo Hangeor's Sixth Recipe: for inducing vomiting in case of poison.

Take Hiyobu (identification uncertain)
Peel off bark from trunk.
The resulting core should be very soft.
Slice it crossways into thin sections; make about two handfuls.
Pound and mix with one gallon of water and give to patient.
Vomiting will start before the patient finishes drinking and will continue for one or two hours. Then give the patient sugar water so he will have a good taste in his mouth.

Aureo Hangeor's Seventh Recipe: for muscular aches.

Take Yaho (*Premna obtusifolia* R. Br.), three stems with small leaves on them
 Chichi (*Polypodium scolopendria* Burm. f.), one handful of baby leaves
Mix and pound.
Squeeze into one glass of water.
Patient drinks water twice a day.

Aureo Hangeor's Eighth Recipe: for cuts.

For cut veins or arteries,
Take Ihaweri (*Vitex negundo* var. *bicolor* (Willd.) Lam.), one handful of leaves
Pound it, place it on the cut, and tie.
For minor cuts,
Take Yaho (*Premna obtusifolia* R. Br.), one handful of leaves
Pound it, place it on the cut, and tie.

Eusobio Chiheihie's Recipes.

Eusobio Chiheihie's First Recipe: for TB--coughing blood, no fever. This medicine, which he learned from his parents is his "favorite thing." He is positive no one else knows of it and is very hesitant about telling anyone, but he knows that many people in Koror suffer from TB.

Take Fariup (*Eugenia*, ?; Micronesian apple), inner bark or fiber, a strip about five inches wide and 12 inches long
 Aisas (*Terminalia catappa* L.), inner bark or fiber, a strip about five inches wide and 12 inches long
 Hirifou (*Hibiscus tiliaceus* L.), inner bark or fiber, a strip about five inches wide and 12 inches long
 Hamahi (*Scaevola taccada* (Gaertn.) Roxb.), inner bark or fiber, a strip about two and 1/2 inches long by five inches.

Pound and mix. Do not pound too much or you will lose the sap from the bark.
Mix into one gallon of fresh water.

Add 1/2 cup sea water from beach. If mixture does not taste salty, add more sea water.

Either boil until red or keep for three days until red.

Give the patient as much as he can drink.

Give patient sugar water or Haichi to sweeten his mouth.

Give patient as much as he can drink as often as he can take it.

Patient should remain in bed for length of cure--about one month.

When first batch is finished, simply add more fresh water. Taste. If not salty, add sea (not just salt) water.

Do not reboil.

After second or third batch, there will be a red sediment in the bottom of the pot. Throw away and start again.

Eusobio Chiheihie's Second Recipe: for small cuts. An original medicine discovered by Eusebio. He "cut the tree and looked and decided to try it."

Take Japanese tree, Bung Sapan (*Plumeria rubra* L.)

Cut branch.

Hold it over cut and let white sap drip on cut.

Sap dries and stops bleeding.

Eusobio Chiheihie's Third Recipe: for bad cuts.

Take Ihaweri (*Vitex negundo* var. *bicolor* (Willd.) Lam.), one handful of leaves

Pound leaves.

Put leaves on the cut and tie it up.

Bleeding will stop in one hour.
