

Preference of end of life care --Comparative study of Thai and Japanese elderly--

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It is only human beings in this living world who have endeavored to manage disease and disability. Utilizing medical techniques and helping each other, humans cooperate until the very last breath in life. Even though death may be around the corner, curable situations must be cured, regardless of age. However, it is sometimes difficult to know which medical care is beneficial to the patient especially during the latter stages of life. Yet in the meantime, informal care which is provided by the family and community is supposed to be beneficial and at times vital to all patients. Therefore, we conducted the descriptive study of preference of end of life care in Japan and Thailand.

We examined 149 elderly subjects (mean age 82.2) living in a nursing home in Kyoto, Japan, and 13 outpatients at Chayapum Hospital, Thailand. In Japan, 28.9% of the participants had a living will and 78.6% of them did not want to have feeding by tube introduced. In Thailand, nobody choose nasal tube feeding if they were unable to eat by themselves, meanwhile 54% of them choose drip intravenous infusion.

I visited a temple which was situated near Khon Ken in rural Thailand and saw an 82 year old monk suffering from the end-stage prostate cancer. He had not been able to walk by himself for 2 months before so he could not go to the toilet by himself. However, his son, daughter in law, grandchild and many young monks were taking care of him whenever was necessary. He did not feel any pain as far as he was taking pain killers and seemed to be very peaceful. All of those who had cared for him never felt that the care was a burden for them, as there were many people among whom his care was divided. Overuse of medical techniques seemed to be rare and rich care for older people was possible in rural Thailand. When I found the monk who was being cared for respectfully by families and young monks, and who was spending a peaceful end of life, I wished that the family care system would continue forever regardless of population ageing in Thailand.