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The Possibilities of Integrating Lā'au Lapa'au into Physical Therapy

A Full-body Approach to Recovery

KUAIWI LAKA KAHIWAKAPU PILI I HAUPAPANUI MAKUA

HWST 385 Research Paper
Mentor: Kumu Keoki Baclayon

In the spring of 2017, I took the HWST 385: Lā'au Lapa'au II: Advance Medicine lecture taught by Kumu Keoki Baclayon at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. While taking the course, I was given the simple task of completing a short research paper with the freedom to choose my own health topic as long as the interest pertained to a potential thesis or dissertation. Since my desired career is in physical therapy, I decided to do qualitative research on how lā'au lapa'au (traditional Hawaiian herbal medicine) can be integrated into that medical practice. For my research methods, I sought out the main responsibilities of a physical therapist, then made connections between the two practices with research based on personal interviews, lecture notes, and accredited articles and websites. From this work, I conclude that this collaborative system has the potential to influence each other in regards to spiritual healing, nutrition, and natural pain and inflammation medication. As a result of this paper, I became inspired to start a bi-monthly health awareness workshop series for my on-campus job and further dedicate myself to research by applying to the Māhina International Indigenous Health Research Training Program for the summer of 2018.

Here in Hawai'i, Lā'au Lapa'au (traditional Hawaiian herbal medicine) is an accepted practice to the Hawaiian Community, yet scrutinized heavily by western conventional medicine. According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), traditional, herbal, or holistic approaches to medicine are considered non-mainstream and can be utilized as Complementary and Alternative Medicine (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). Although bringing

traditional and modern western medicine together is a part of integrative medicine (as it promotes conventional and complementary approaches), hospitals and clinics in Hawai'i are not fully stressing the significance and usage of Hawaiian traditional medicine in every practice (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). In order to gain a full-body method to healing in a cultural context, the Hawaiian and Non-Hawaiian medical community must regard Lā'au Lapa'au as a valid inte-



I am currently a 5th year undergraduate pursuing a degree in Kinesiology and Rehabilitation Science. My career goal is to become a physical therapist and open my own clinic in Wai'anae one day. This writing assignment has afforded me the chance to reflect on how I, as a kanaka and a future healer, can integrate cultural knowledge from Lā'au Lapa'au into my future profession. I found that I did not struggle in completing this piece, but rather, my struggle lies with the restrictions our current society places on both practices. These restrictions have sparked a desire in me to seek out ways to counter these roadblocks and possibly one day make the integration between the practices a real course of treatment that is available to my lāhui.

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grative option. Physical Therapy is a prime candidate for the integration of Lā'au Lapa'au due to the potential of expanding the practice's current protocols in spiritual healing, nutrition, and natural pain & inflammation medication.

In order to understand the similarities between the two healing practices, more background must be given for Physical Therapy. The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) states that PT is the healthcare profession of diagnosing and treating patients with medical issues that has caused them to lose their mobility and capability to perform daily activities. Thus, a physical therapist conducts treatment by developing a plan of care that promotes movement, reduces pain, restores function, and prevents disability (APTA). Due to the high demand for a PTs care, they treat a wide age range of patients and work in essentially all medical settings. For instance, in the hospital setting, a PT usually cares for 6 patients at a time and must ensure each receives 3 hours of rehabilitation 5 days a week (Saiki). An in-patient PT's average day consists of making sure all their patients have the proper devices for rehab, creating an exercise and diet program for aftercare, testing patients' cognition, and conducting community assessments to ensure the patients' environments are safe enough once discharged from the hospital (Saiki). Although Outpatient settings are not as all-encompassing as In-patient care, the goals of a physical therapist are still the same: assist the healing process by educating and promoting a healthier lifestyle, especially through movement.

Although Lā'au Lapa'au can be considered a lifestyle all on its own, the far-reaching practice is similar to physical therapy in terms of teaching patients how to care for their long-term health. Kāhuna Lā'au Lapa'au (priests/doctors who practiced Lā'au Lapa'au) specialize in the ways of pregnancy and birthing, pediatrics, diagnosing through touch and observation, magic for healing, illness caused by spirits, and much more (Kamakau). The principles of Lā'au Lapa'au consist of balancing a patient's mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical wellbeing through pule (prayer), ho'oponopono (traditional practice of family counseling sessions), and the restoration process (Baclayon). The restoration process focuses on healing patients' prominent issues by introducing lā'au and pules and removing the bad influences in their environment, lifestyle, diet, and cleansing that might have caused the illness in the first place (Baclayon). It is through this portion of healing that the education piece comes into play. Not every patient would be able to know what or where to find certain lā'au (plants) to aid them in their time of illness, which is why it's the kuleana (responsibility) of the Kāhuna Lā'au Lapa'au to be there to obtain and administer the lā'au. Once the patient is able to regain their health, the kāhuna would then teach their patients how to maintain their health as a preventive measure.

In the best interest of any patient suffering from pain and inflammation as a byproduct of an underlining issue, a PT needs to consider getting in contact with the patient's Pri-

mary Care Provider (PCP) to ensure a plan of care and giving their patient a referral to a Kāhuna Lā'au Lapa'au to prescribe any lā'au. According to the APTA, prescribing medication for the "[reduction] of pain and/or inflammation, [promotion] of integumentary repair and/or protection, [facilitating] airway clearance and/or ventilation and respiration, [facilitating] adequate circulation and/or metabolism, and [facilitating] functional [movement]" are all within the scope of physical therapy (APTA). However; in the state of Hawai'i, a Physical Therapist cannot prescribe medications (DCCA). Thus, in order for a Physical Therapist to incorporate Lā'au Lapa'au into their care plan, getting in touch with their patients' PCP first is ideal, as this communication will hopefully make accessing the patients' medical records easier for the referred Kāhuna Lā'au Lapa'au. With this in mind, one lā'au lapa'au treatment for inflammation is having a patient ingest small amounts of nī'oi (red chili pepper) and kālika (garlic) throughout the day to aide in increasing the circulation of blood flow. The swelling caused by inflammation can decrease if the patient consumed 'ōlena (turmeric) and comfrey. Additionally, PTs can treat patients with pain through massage. They can use a mixture of 'awa (piper methysticum) and coconut oil as a topical lubricant that affects the patient as a muscle relaxant, which can aide in the soothing of muscle strains and pains. Also, one of the best ways to treat neural pain and complications is to ingest Hinahinakūmekokoikapali (heliotropium anomalum). Although Physical Therapists are restricted from prescribing medication, this does not mean that they cannot educate or suggest Lā'au Lapa'au as a way to get past their ailments.

By introducing lā'au into diet plans and encouraging healthy eating habits in their patients, Physical Therapists have the chance to improve the lives of their patients. Many people that come to physical therapy tend to display signs of obesity and autoimmune diseases. The most basic treatment for obesity is to increase patients' physical activity and reduce excess calorie intake. With these kinds of patients, there is a need to be specific because they might be predisposed to other health complications such as osteoarthritis and cardiovascular disease (Manzel *et al.*). The best kind of diet for the people of Hawai'i is a low fat, high starch, and moderate protein diet, which is standard in the Hawaiian Diet (Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center). A physical therapist can incorporate lā'au into this specialized diet through including the practice of juicing and drinking Hawaiian teas (Baclayon). Kauna'oa (*cuscuta sandwichiana*), nī'oi, 'ōlena, and kālika are immune-building herbs that can be juiced with fruits to drink daily in the mornings (Baclayon). In addition, those with autoimmune diseases will benefit from drinking juiced herbs such as koali'awa (*ipo oeaindica*), koali pehu (*ipomoea alba*), pāū'ohi'iaka (*jacquemontia sandwicensis*), and pōhuehue (*Ipomoea pes-caprae* subsp. *brasiliensis*) (Baclayon). Another common health complication in Hawai'i is diabetes. By drinking ko'oko'olau (*bidens asymmetrica*) tea and noni juice three

times a day, patients with diabetes have improved tremendously (Ulukau). Through teaching and demonstrating the benefits of consuming lā'au, the demand for the plants will increase. Thus, if patients truly wish to help themselves they, or at least their community, must put more effort into growing these special lā'au. Lā'au Lapa'au has so much to offer, which is the very reason why more Physical Therapists should utilize it in their practice or simply work alongside a Kāhuna Lā'au Lapa'au.

Although Physical Therapy does not incorporate spiritual healing as a standard practice like much of western medicine, the implementation of spirituality into PT practice has the potential to improve emotional and spiritual wellbeing of patients as seen in Lā'au Lapa'au. Spirituality is defined as “the transcendent, addressing ultimate questions about life's meaning, with the assumption that there is more to life than what we see or fully understand” (Tapley *et al.*). Keeping this in mind, Hawaiian people were without a doubt a highly spiritual people. Prior to healing a person, the Kāhuna Lā'au Lapa'au would have to pule to their 'aumakua (deified ancestors) to guide them to gaining insight as to making a diagnoses (Pukui *et al.*). Pule was essential during the gathering of lā'au, the making of the medicine and the application of it because the mana (supernatural/divine power) of the higher beings is what was thought to actually bring about the healing (Pukui *et al.*). Although it would not be recommended to force pule onto a patient, allowing the patient to know and understand their own spirituality, as a healer would be for the best. As mentioned earlier, most Physical Therapists are hesitant to implement religion or spirituality in the care of their patients, but do in fact see that speaking with patients about spirituality (rather than religion) has been beneficial in “[coping] with injury, illness, and pain, and potentially strengthening the patient-therapist relationship” (Sargeant & Newsham).

Going further into this notion of spiritual healing, physical therapy can use ho'oponopono to access and appease the spiritual and emotional wellbeing of patients. When there were issues occurring within a family, it was traditional to have a kupuna (elder), who wasn't directly involved in the dispute, mediate a ho'oponopono session in hopes to bring about a peaceful resolution (Baclayon). This special therapy session can be looked at as an opportunity for the healer (mediator) to gain insight on their patient's emotional trauma and even utilize this knowledge to further their future care plan. A session would usually begin with opening remarks about what is the issue being discussed, also referred to as kūkulu kumuhana (the initial act of bringing forth the issues and the rules that will be discussed in the session), which is then followed by pule (Baclayon). The remainder of the session will go through hala (the offense committed by the offending party that has caused the offended to hold a grudge), ho'omauhala (this is when the offended party is holding a grudge and unwilling to resolve the issue even when the offending party is trying), ho'omalua (a timeout or breaking put into place by the media-

tor to allow people to either cool-off from an argument or use as a time of silent reflection), hihia (a time of mixed negative feels by both the offending and offended parties in response to the negative issues being discussed), mahiki (a time for each person to share his or her side of the story in the session with the mediator), mihi (a time where offenders would ask for forgiveness and where the offended would have to forgive them no matter what), kala (a time where the issue was made done and the bad feelings let go by everyone), 'oki (the ending of the issue and ho'oponopono session), and pani (the closing ceremony where the mediator would offer pule and makana to the akua and 'aumakua) (Baclayon). The most important part of this whole process in reference to physical therapy would have to be mihi (the asking of forgiveness) and kala (the release of the burden). For instance, if a patient might be suffering from pain caused by a car accident, they must first forgive those who were a part of the incident and ultimately themselves. The resentment from the whole situation will give the rest of the body negative mana and possibly slow down the healing process. Thus, before a PT can tackle the issue of ridding their patient's pain, they have to first establish this realization and allow the patient to set him or herself free. Spiritual practices, such as pule and ho'oponopono, could really make a difference by establishing trust and promoting positivity in the achievement of better health.

Lā'au Lapa'au has much potential and such a wide reach in the foundations of medicine; Physical Therapists here in Hawai'i are missing out. Utilizing lā'au in common practice for the relief of pain and inflammation is clean and natural. Consuming lā'au improves general health and boosts cultural awareness of planting lā'au. Lastly, spiritual and emotional health can be achieved through pule and ho'oponopono as a means to understand patients' trauma caused by their physical ailments and develop future care plans. Without a doubt, this collaborative system of health is just the first step to a greater holistic lāhui (nation).

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