

Not a single witch doctor in Kyrgyzstan has been licensed for practice by the ministry of health, but folk healers thrive in the country.

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The sun is just rising and I'm on my way to the healer, Gulya, who lives near Bishkek. The previous day, she said on the phone she was receiving patients since 7 am and by that time two cars parked near her house - "live" queue.

The yard is well-groomed, with two benches for visitors. When my turn comes finally, I enter a small room with soviet carpets on the floor and bunches of dried herbs. A big knife, a can, salt, matches, and a plate with chimney soot and juniper sit on the table covered with a tablecloth.

Gulya is a 60-65-year-old woman wearing a worn-out grey pullover. She greets me with a peculiar accent.

- Sit down, honey, what's the trouble? - the healer asks hastily.

- I feel weak and my head aches frequently, - I said according to my made-up story.

She takes my hand, closes her eyes, keeps silence for half a minute and then says:

You are not married yet, but you have to as it's high time for you to become a mother, and you are behind time and your body fails. You have frequent headaches and stomach aches. You have hypertension and gynaecological diseases.

I don't really have any of the above and I have hypotension instead, but I ask her how she's going to heal me.

"Take some water," Gulya said pointing at a one-litre jar filled with water, she adds some salt using the knife and stirs it with the same knife.

She would add a powder made of various herbs to the "healing" recipe, which I

should take every day from her.

I look at this not very clean jar and think how many people had taken water from it before me and if it was ever cleaned. I pretend to drink water and listen to further instructions from the healer - I should come to her every day for 10 days and bring water, sugar, salt and tea with me. She will be charming them for me to drink. She would also add a powder made of various herbs to the “healing” recipe, which I should take every day from her keeping the dosage.

This ten-day course will cost me 2,000 som (28.71 dollars).

Searching for miracle

Kyrgyzstan has promising advertisements of witch doctors everywhere: at large markets, on television, in newspapers, in various communities and forums. People still seek salvation in folk healers at the age of hi tech.

According to director of public foundation Pomogat Legko **Dinara Alyaeva**, the lower the level of development of medicine, the more people are moved by the instinct of self-preservation.

“When people see havoc in medical institutions, powerlessness of doctors, they go to healers. There’s another point, incurable diseases or oncology. When it’s a child, they want to turn the world upside down to cure it. So people go to healers searching for miracle. This is not about the level of education of those people who go to healers, but about the level of trust in the medicine offered by the state,” she said.



Dinara Alyaeva. Photo: kaktus.media

The father of **Ainura Cholponkulova** died one year ago from lung cancer. The disease was detected when official medicine could not help it.

We didn’t believe the doctors and found a witch doctor with the help of our friends.

- My father started to lose weight within a short time and complained about weakness. When we went to see a doctor, analysis showed he had cancer. Doctors said it was fourth stage cancer, which meant he would die soon.

We didn't believe the doctors and found a witch doctor with the help of our friends. She examined him and said she had an extract of aconite and recommended to take it. She indicated the proper dosage. She also warned us aconite was very poisonous.

The healer said she didn't guarantee healing in our case, but she had patients who were healed in her practice.

One litre of her extract cost 1.5 thousand som (21.5 dollars). He was taking it for three months and we paid almost 20 thousand som (287 dollars) to the healer. However, dad never recovered...



Ernis Tilekov. Photo: rus.azattyk.org

According to the head of the National Oncology Centre, **Ernis Tilekov**, many patients are sure that no surgical interventions may be made in case of cancer or else the disease may progress. Therefore, they go to folk healers.

"When people visit such healers, they waste precious time when a patient could be treated with surgery, medications, radiation therapy. They come to us when it's too late, in terminal stages, when official medicine cannot help. So it ends with the death of a patient," Tilekov said.

"We invite you to healing courses"

In 2016, a 54-year-old Kyrgyzstani woman died after healer Khashim Zainaliev tried to cut off her breast affected by cancer. The woman has died from blood loss.

The same year a boy has died diagnosed with psoriasis. His parents thought treatment by doctors was useless and took him to a healer, who treated the boy with copper sulphate.

In November 2018, a five-year-old girl in serious condition was delivered to the National Paediatric Oncology and Haematology Centre. She was treated by Zainaliev from blood cancer.

There was a struggle against the activity of Khashim Zainaliev for a few years – criminal cases were opened and closed. Only this April, the court finally prohibited him from treating patients and imposed a penalty on him in the amount of 100 thousand som (1,435.7 dollars). Afterwards, the fake healer reportedly left the country.



Khashim Zainaliev. Photo: kloop.kg

According to Ernis Tilekov, the authorities of Oman allowed Zainaliev to treat people and he is going to continue his activity there.

In early July, users of social media shared a photo of an advertisement where people were invited to healing courses. The fact that the license was issued by the ministry of education and science caused even more anger.

According to the spokeswoman of the agency, Marina Grechannaya, the license was issued for courses in cosmetology, make-up, tailors, cooks and cookery specialists. The license has already expired and one can complain about the courses to the financial police only.

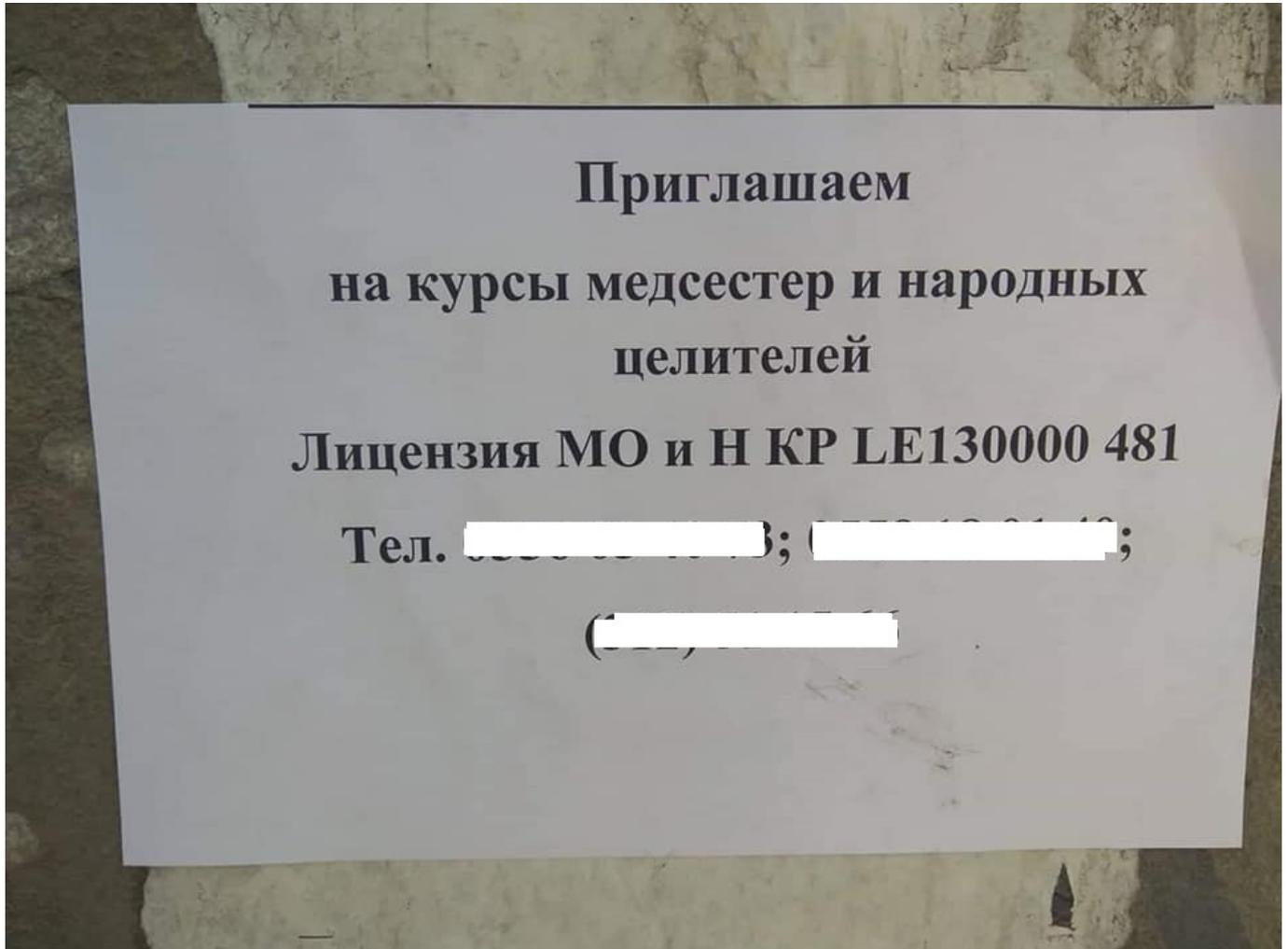


Photo: Facebook

The head of the licensing department of the ministry of health of Kyrgyzstan, **Burul Arzykulova**, said not a single witch doctor in the country has been licensed for practice.

“There is a special decree of the government, which lists the requirements for those who want to engage in private medical practice. There’s also a special board that examines even experienced doctors and then issues a license for private practice or a private clinic,” Arzykulova said.

In particular, to get a license the following documents are required:

- diploma of higher medical education, certificate of clinical residency (internship);
- employment record book;
- qualification certificate of category;

- copies of certificate of postgraduate or advanced training;
- copies of specialist recognition certificate.

If the applicant has no medical education, he should hire specialists. But they also have to provide relevant documents and pass examinations.

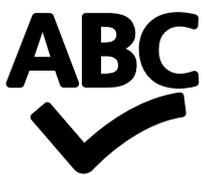
She noted that Kyrgyzstan does not have a centre that would verify healing qualities in witch doctors.

“For example, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have special research centres that verify if a person has bioelectric current or other qualities that would help healing the diseases and then issue special authorisation for treatment. We don’t have such centre, so our witch doctors are out of control,” she said.

The ministry of health cannot supervise the activity of folk healers as they are not doctors. And law enforcement bodies need to receive reports from citizens in order to initiate a case. However, according to the press service representative of Chief Directorate of Internal Affairs, **Ulan Dzhumakov**, no one has reported such cases in Bishkek.

“There is no special law regulating the activity of magicians, sorcerers and healers. However, if their actions fall under the criminal, procedural code, relevant measures will be applied to them,” Dzhumakov said.

This article was prepared as part of the Giving Voice, Driving Change - from the Borderland to the Steppes Project implemented with the financial support of the Foreign Ministry of Norway. The opinions expressed in the article do not reflect the position of the editorial or donor.



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