

**UNDERSTANDING MENOPAUSAL WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE
OF HORMONE USE FOR SKIN ANTI-AGING IN VIETNAM**

The background features a large, faint watermark of the Mahidol University logo. It is a circular emblem with Thai script around the perimeter and a central design that includes a stupa and other traditional symbols.

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
(HEALTH SOCIAL SCIENCE)
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
MAHIDOL UNIVERISTY**

2013

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PENCHAN SHERER, Ph.D, THAMMARAT MAROHABUTR, Ph.D**ABSTRACT**

The use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for skin anti-aging is becoming increasingly common among Vietnamese menopausal women. As HRT involves health risks, it is necessary to understand the cultural and social factors that drive menopausal women to choose the treatment.

The objective of this study was to understand menopausal women's experiences of hormone use for skin anti-aging in Vietnam.

Qualitative medical anthropology methodology was used. Four dermatologists and 8 menopausal patients of dermatologists using HRT for skin anti-aging were interviewed, and 4 dermatologist-patient interactions were observed in a public hospital in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

The women's beauty ideals included having white, smooth, moist, natural-looking skin with no wrinkles or other imperfections. They believed beauty was necessary for them to ensure a happy family life and success with their career. This belief had a superstitious element as they explained seemingly unrelated misfortunes with their own reduced attractiveness. They thought this reduction in their attractiveness resulted from menopause. The interviewed patients had previously tried many beauty treatments but were not satisfied. When dermatologists (as well as media, friends, husbands, etc.) explained to them that their complaints resulted from menopause and could be alleviated by HRT, they accepted the explanation and the treatment. Dermatologists usually prescribed a brand name product with plant estrogens and collagen, combined with antioxidants, sun screens and health advice. None of the patients questioned the medical menopause discourse that conceptualized their complaints as symptoms of hormone and collagen deficiency. Their affluence made HRT available for them. They faced great pressure from husbands, colleagues, and others to look beautiful, which also explained their belief that beauty was necessary for them.

Evidence on the safety of HRT is inconclusive, but the women patients were not told this and believed HRT is safe. Menopausal women need to be given comprehensive, unbiased information about menopause and HRT. The cultural beliefs behind HRT use need to be deconstructed among Vietnamese women.

**KEY WORDS: MENOPAUSE / DERMATOLOGY / HORMONE
REPLACEMENT THERAPY / SKIN ANTI-AGING /
CULTURAL BELIEFS**

100 pages