ABSTRACT

This study was a cross-sectional descriptive study aimed at identifying the health-seeking behavior and its related factors of the elderly in rural areas of Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand.

The study sample was 200 elderly aged 60 or above. The study objectives were to investigate health-seeking behavior and the related socio-demographic characteristics, perception about illness, attitudes towards institutional treatment and social support. A pre-tested structured questionnaire was used to collect the relevant information by face to face interview with the help of trained interviewers during April 2001.

The results showed that the majority of the respondents (54.5%) were females. More than half were currently married and the majority of the elderly were in the age group of 60-69 years. Most of them (58.0%) had an education level of primary school and more than half had no occupation.

For acute illness, the majority of the respondents preferred self-treatment and nearly one third visited the government hospital. In the case of chronic illness, the majority (87.6%) went for institutional treatment. The young-old respondents used government hospital than the older group both for acute and chronic illness. It was observed that the elderly used multiple sources of treatment during illness. On the other hand, the rural health center was found to be less utilized by the elderly respondents compared to the district hospital.

It is recommended that more efforts should be targeted at first level health facilities. Special emphasis should be given to the government hospital because most of the elderly preferred to go there for treatment both for acute and chronic illness. Health education on preventive aspects of health, both physical and mental, should be promoted to the elderly, especially at the earlier age, and their family members.

More detailed ethnographic and behavioral studies are needed to explore the factors related to the health-seeking pattern of the elderly. Similar studies on specific illnesses and health-seeking patterns of the elderly should be undertaken to obtain more accurate information which will be helpful in formulating policy on the health care delivery system in rural areas, especially for the aging.