

Desperate, sick Indonesians use railroad 'therapy'

August 2 2011, By MICHAEL HOLTZ , Associated Press



In this July 26, 2011 photo, villagers lie on a railway track for an electricity therapy in Rawa Buaya, Jakarta, Indonesia. People in the outskirts of the capital have been participating in the treatment believing that the electricity current from the track could cure various diseases. (AP Photo/Achmad Ibrahim)

(AP) -- Ignoring the red-and-white danger sign, Sri Mulyati walks slowly to the train tracks outside Indonesia's bustling capital, lies down and stretches her body across the rails.

Like the nearly dozen others lined up along the track, the 50-year-old diabetes patient has all but given up on doctors and can't afford the

expensive medicines they prescribe.

In her mind, she has only one option left: electric therapy.

"I'll keep doing this until I'm completely cured," said Mulyati, twitching visibly as an oncoming [passenger train](#) sends an extra rush of current racing through her body.

She leaps from tracks as it approaches and then, after the last carriage rattles slowly by, climbs back into position.

Pseudo-medical treatments are wildly popular in many parts of Asia - where rumors about those miraculously cured after touching a magic stone or eating dung from sacred cows can attract hundreds, sometimes thousands.

That may be especially true in Indonesia, where chronic funding shortages and chaotic decentralization efforts since the 1998 ouster of longtime dictator Suharto have left many disillusioned with the state-sponsored health system, said Marius Widjajarta, chairman of the Indonesian Health Consumers Empowerment Foundation.

Medical experts say there is no evidence lying on the rails does any good.

But Mulyati insists it provides more relief for her symptoms - high-blood pressure, sleeplessness and [high cholesterol](#) - than any doctor has since she was first diagnosed with diabetes 13 years ago.

She turned to train track therapy last year after hearing a rumor about an ethnic Chinese man who was partially paralyzed by a stroke going to the tracks to kill himself, but instead finding himself cured.

It's a story that's been told and retold in Indonesia.

Until recently, more than 50 people would show up at the Rawa Buaya tracks every day. But the numbers have dropped since police and the state-run railroad company erected a warning sign and threatened penalties of up to three months in prison or fines of \$1,800.

No one has been arrested yet, and none of the participants in train track therapy has died.

But the dedicated dozen a day who still come say they have no plans to stop.

"They told us not to do it anymore, but what else can I do," said Hadi Winoto, a 50-year-old stroke victim who has trouble walking.

"I want to be cured, so I have to come back."

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