

Lance — Taqiq

WIIKA TAUGUM TAQIKIL. – MY HUSBAND WAS LANCED BY THAT PERSON.



Photo: Blood letting horn from Old Harbor. Collected by Bill Laughlin, KANA Collection.

Among the techniques used by Alutiiq healers, lancing and bloodletting were chief remedies for pain and illness. Elders recall that the famous tribal doctor Oleanna Ashouwak (1909–1965), a resident of Kaguyak, used these techniques to help people experiencing headaches. She would cut the skin at the back of a patient's head with a small knife, to release "bad blood." If the patient didn't bleed very much, Ashouwak used a small tool made from a cow's horn to suck out additional blood. Similar bloodletting practices employed on the head, wrists, or thumb, were also treatments for pneumonia, tuberculosis, and chest pain. Healers also employed bloodletting after the birth of a baby, to help new mothers regain their strength.

A bloodletting tool in the Alutiiq Museum's collections is fashioned from a cow's horn. This piece was collected in Old Harbor in the 1950s. Elders recall that such horns were used both to numb the skin before it was lanced and to induce bleeding after lancing.

In addition to bloodletting, Alutiiq healers practiced a variety of other surgeries and employed massage, herbal treatments, and holding to treat their patients. Many of these activities took place in the warm, restorative environment of the steam bath.