



Review Article

Integrative medicine: A path to holistic healthcare

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed our entire viewpoint on the health-care systems in India. The concept of well-being has now taken the spotlight. Preventive techniques from different systems of medicine were adopted by the people which proved to be highly efficacious in beating the symptoms. This pandemic has taught us various lessons, of which embracing our traditional health systems is an important one. This crisis has given us an opportunity to understand that as much as how modern healthcare is doing wonders, the traditional health systems also have gems of wisdom which need to be explored and made accessible to all. Hence, integration of modern medicine with our traditional medicine would help us to treat an individual as a whole in a holistic manner.

Keywords: Health-care systems, Integrative medicine, AYUSH, Preventive medicine, Alternative medicine

INTRODUCTION

The origin of medicine goes far back to ancient times. As per the records, the utilization of plants as medicines was done about 60,000 years before.^[1] Treatment practices were greatly dependent on the civilization's social, economic, and religious cultures. They were to a greater extent evolved from personal perspectives. These historical roots were descended thereby allowing adoption of such practices into the current treatment patterns. However, there has been an enormous disinclination toward such adoption. Health-care systems in today's time provide generalized algorithms of treatment which lack the human touch and are often replaced with machinery due to advancing technology. As much as these advancements are life-saving and help us develop in ample aspects, there is a paucity in the subject of well-being among patients due to the essence of therapeutics. Treating the cause behind the ailment should be made the primary focus rather than just treating the symptoms. Hence, integration of traditional herbal medicine with modern medicine will give us a better perspective of all the determinants of the disease and thereby holistic complete management can be provided.^[2]

INDIAN TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

In contrast to other countries, Indian medicine was solely derived in India on its own, although it was clubbed with other cultures such as the Greek in the later period. In the ancient periods, the important medical findings and herbal properties were documented in sacred books known as "Vedas." One of which was known as the "Atharvaveda" which consisted of conglomerate of chants and spells for the cure of various diseases. This has led to the rise of the traditional Indian medicine known as "Ayurveda." It is mainly based on body nourishment as well as longevity.

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Yoga practices originated way before the Pre-Vedic period, it was considered a practice which separated the self from the body. This has a meditative as well as a spiritual component which emphasizes that it is more than just a physical exercise. It has been a source of healing for various disorders starting from endocrinological problems to mental disorders such as depression and anxiety.

Unani medicine is largely based on the four elements of the human body (fire, water, earth, and air). These were represented by different fluids of the body. Perfect harmony between these components idealizes good health.^[3]

Siddha medicine is one type which is widespread in the regions of Southern India especially Tamil Nadu. The literature is completely in Tamil and has yet not been completely translated into English. Traditional Indian medicine is one of the gems which we should treasure and apply in current times to bring in forward looking models of healthcare.^[4]

Current scenario of healthcare in India

In the last century, there has been tremendous medical and technological growth worldwide. The mortality rates have dropped, various clinical trials have been conducted, discoveries of life saving drugs have been made, life-threatening ailments have been cured etc. The landscape of modern medicine is at a different level altogether. Despite all these various households still rely on the time proven age old traditional and complementary medicine due to the lack of access to modern healthcare. In this situation, the question as to whether “health for all” is achieved arises. Thus, integration of the traditional herbal medicine into medical practice might answer this question.^[2]

FORMULATION OF AYURVEDA, YOGA, NATUROPATHY, UNANI, SIDDHA, AND HOMEOPATHY (AYUSH)

The Indian system of Medicine and Homeopathy was set up in 1995, and was then renamed the department of AYUSH in November 2003. On November 2014, the Ministry of AYUSH was formed.^[5]

STEPS TAKEN BY THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT TOWARD ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

To elevate education of Indian system of Medicine and Ayurveda worldwide, the ministry has signed 13 MOUs for having partnerships with various foreign universities by which our nation’s AYUSH experts would be deputed to take up teaching or research activities there. Varied scholarships are being provided for the education of Native Indian medicine. Through the concept of “AYUSH Grams,”

AYUSH-based way of life is imbibed through Behavioral Change Communication; education of the village level workers for the use of local medicinal herbs and other AYUSH health services. Various IEC activities have been done by the Ministry of AYUSH at national and state levels. Thirty-three AYUSH information cells in 31 countries have been made to provide genuine details about various AYUSH systems. The concept of integrative health policy has been materialized by the NITI Ayog. This is to provide affordable evidence-based healthcare in National Programs keeping in mind modern and traditional integrative methods. An MOU was signed with the Ministry of Railways for the development of AYUSH wings at five Railway zonal hospitals.^[6]

PLAY OF ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The outbreak of the deadly coronavirus 19 which is now an ongoing pandemic started in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. In October 2020, the union minister for health and family welfare, Government of India released the “National clinical management protocol based on Ayurveda and Yoga for management of COVID-19.”^[7] This involved integration of Ayurveda and Yoga with modern medicine for the prevention, treatment, and prophylaxis of COVID-19 infection. This was an important milestone toward “Swastha and Atma Nirbhar Bharat.” These guidelines not only aided in COVID-19 management but also aided in bringing back traditional medicine for the treatment of current health issues. It exposes the potential of AYUSH systems in treating several flu-like illnesses. This protocol formulated jointly by the Ministry of AYUSH and Ministry of Health and Family welfare sets a trend for the integrative management of other such disorders.^[8]

INITIATIVES OF THE MINISTRY OF AYUSH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Ministry of AYUSH has issued a set of guidelines formulated by the Ayurveda experts for self-care during COVID-19. Online teleconsultations were happening in full swing. “AYUSH for immunity” campaigns were rolled out to raise public awareness. The AYUSH dashboard and the National repository on AYUSH COVID-19 activities have all information regarding clinical trials, ongoing research, and publications. Instructions to hasten the process of approval/license renewal for manufacturing Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani drugs were sent to all states and Union territories. Immunity boosting healthcare such as Siddha medicine-Kabasura Kudineer; Ayurvedic formulations such as Guduchi ghan vati, Mahasudarshan ghan vati, Ashwagandha, Anu taila, and Tulsi have grown tremendously during this pandemic. The income of farmers who cultivated various

herbal medicinal plants also multiplied during this period. Various AYUSH hospitals were used as quarantine facilities and post-COVID care centers. A total of 8,32,445 AYUSH practitioners had signed up as COVID warriors on the government portal. Enormous number of research projects in collaboration with the Department of Biotechnology and ICMR was conducted to analyze the immunomodulatory actions of various AYUSH interventions. The Ministry of AYUSH had also launched the AYUSH clinical case repository portal and the AYUSH Sanjivani which is a mobile based application on the acceptance and use of AYUSH advocacies on COVID-19 prevention. As cruel as this pandemic is, it has been a blessing in disguise for us to go back to our historical roots.^[9]

LESSONS TO BE LEARNT

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us various lessons, of which embracing our traditional health systems is an important one. This crisis has given us an opportunity to understand that as much as how modern healthcare is doing wonders, the traditional health systems also have gems of wisdom which need to be explored and made accessible to all. The prejudice against AYUSH mainly rests on evidence obtained by research done in controlled settings. These forms of medicine solely depend on personalized experiences; hence, analysis of such data requires advanced statistics as it is not so straightforward. The inclusion of Ayurveda and Yoga in the National COVID-19 management protocol is based on proof of real-life experiences. Nevertheless, the medical education systems in India tend to overlook the evaluation of living experiences. This is exactly opposite to that of China where traditional medicine practice is valued to the same level as that of modern medicine. Our doctors are not aware of the AYUSH practices thereby creating unhealthy competition and hierarchical clashes between them. This leads to mediocre quality healthcare and ultimately the patients bear the brunt of such happenings.^[10]

CONCLUSION

There are constant changes with time in the health-care systems around the globe. The foundations of these systems have been laid down far behind in history; we are privileged to use such knowledge from the past to bring complete well rounded health-care practices in the future. This is a chance for us to invigorate Integrative medicine by honoring our modern medical achievements in bio medics as well

as respecting the traditional medical knowledge we have inherited.

Declaration of patient consent

Patient's consent not required as there are no patients in this study.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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