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Ayurveda - The Science for Next Generations

Dr Galib

Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Rasa Shastra & Bhaishajya Kalpana, IPGT&RA, Gujarat Ayurved University, Jamnagar, Gujarat, INDIA, 361008

Email: galib14@yahoo.co.in, Mobile: +919428671275

With drastic changes in life style, increased industrialization, and pollution; global population of 21st Century is witnessing various kinds of Life Style Diseases. These diseases that are preventable are the world's biggest killers, causing an estimated 35 million deaths each year. Unless addressed, the mortality and disease burden from these problems will continue to increase. On possible consideration of this aspect; WHO recognized this decade as *Decade of Life Style Disorders*.

Since inception, modern medical science depended upon synthetic or isolated extracts, which are beneficial in breaking the pathology, but are also known for certain shortcomings like drug dependency, developing adverse effects etc. On the other facet of coin; this system failed to develop effective treatment strategies for many chronic diseases including the newly emerging life style diseases. Hence, interest has been increased on alternatives from reliable resources like that of Ayurveda. In due course of time; an upsurge of interest in age-old medicines and therapeutic methods has been noticed. WHO too recognized the significance of traditional remedies in health care system; encouraged and promoted them in national healthcare programmes as they are comparatively safe and people have faith in such remedies.^[1]

How Ayurveda can be beneficial?

Most of the chronic diseases are multi-factorial in origin. Hence, *One Target - One Drug Model* or combinations of drugs acting on a single target is not likely to be satisfactory. Traditional medicines, which usually have multi components, will be helpful in counteracting multi factors.^[2]

Traditional products are usually a combination of several compounds that synergistically act together. Certain typical features of the compound herbal formulations are metabolic activators, prevents toxic effects, immuno-modulating, antioxidants, rejuvenating, increasing bio-availability etc. All these activities indicate towards multi-variant nature of compound formulations.

Another important quality of traditional therapies is the dietary and lifestyle regimens that are essential components of treatments. All therapeutic procedures include specific dietary prescriptions and restrictions to maximize the efficacy of the medicine and to help the process of healing.

Ayurveda, the Indian traditional medicine is a science developed by the experiences and wisdom of Indian ancestors. Ayurvedic researches and reviews published in recent years have helped in creating a conceptual interface between Ayurveda and Modern Science. Though a good deal of research is going on, not much scientific documentation is presently available. Preliminary studies with Ayurvedic formulations provided certain leads, emphasizing impact of traditional systems of medicines in preventing complications and improving the quality of life in patients suffering with chronic diseases like tuberculosis.^[3-6]

Considering the multi-variant beneficial activities of Ayurvedic compound formulations; the healthcare systems existing may join hands together and form a single medical system, which will respect each other, accept their shortcomings, and work together complementing each other without distorting fundamental principles. It will also facilitate development of an integrated and cost effective healthcare system, which will be more acceptable and beneficial to the ailing population.

Challenges in the way of its integration

As the fundamental principles of conventional and contemporary systems are entirely different, it becomes a difficult task to define a roadmap and develop methodologies of their integration. It is right time for both the systems to initiate discussions to capitalize potentials of traditional medicine.

Before actual integration; there is a need

1. To develop AWARENESS regarding the Ayurveda in the modern society,
2. Modern society should be in a condition to understand and ACCEPT Ayurveda
3. Then only APPLICATION is possible.

Way forward

Former Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan also emphasized on to encourage integration of AYUSH with modern medicine and create a holistic healthcare system that can be emulated globally and which will achieve the universal goal of health for all.^[7]

- But, for a new paradigm of integrative medical practice to emerge; contemporary practitioners have to be knowledgeable about the therapeutic potentials of traditional medicine and must be encouraged to collaborate with Ayurvedic practitioners as part of regular patient care.^[8] Accordingly reforms in the educational system to meet the need are necessary.
- Impact of diet and lifestyle modifications that aid patients' recovery should be studied extensively.
- Works on possible interactions between contemporary and conventional systems is also to be initiated.
- Ayurveda dispensaries can be collocated with existing PHC, CHC and at other health care centres of contemporary sciences. Patients can be given a choice to opt the preferred medical system for their treatment. This also will help in integration.
- The actual effectiveness of Ayurveda is to be disseminated through systematically designed researches. Though RCTs are undisputed gold standards in researches of synthetic drugs; as such they cannot be applied to Ayurveda. Approaches like *Whole body systems*, *MOST (Multiphase Optimization Strategy)* or *STROBE (Strengthening the Reporting of Observational studies in Epidemiology)* etc. are to be attempted in researches that include Ayurveda drugs.
- Simple case studies to Multicentric studies can be initiated at least for Non-Communicable Diseases to show the potentiality of Ayurveda in providing satisfactory results.
- Collaboration with sophisticated laboratories like CSIR, ICMR etc is to be initiated with an intention to develop quality control finger prints and to develop safety, efficacy aspects of the formulations. AYURGENOMICS is one of such projects that is trying to search potential links between ayurveda and modern genetics understanding of body, disease and healing.^[9]

As the world is witnessing increasing incidences of chronic, psychosomatic and lifestyle disorders; importance of integrated approach in healthcare has been realizing in recent times. Considering the multi-variant beneficial activities; all healthcare systems of the globe can join hands together to undertake collaborative research respecting fundamental principles of each others. It will also facilitate development of an integrated and cost effective healthcare system, which will be more acceptable and beneficial to the ailing population.

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ABOUT ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Dr. Galib MD (Ayu), PhD is working as Asst. Professor in the Dept. of Rasa Shastra & Bhaishajya Kalpana including Drug Research, IPGT & RA, Gujarat Ayurved University, Jamnagar since September 2007. Additionally, he is serving as Associate Editor, AYU - The Quarterly Peer Reviewed International Journal of Ayurveda, Jamnagar. He has more than 10 Years PG Teaching in concerned subject. Guided more than 14 theses, investigated 3 projects as PI / Co-PI.

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