



Integrated Approach Towards Holistic Health: Current Trends and Future Scope

Mrunal R. Shenwai¹, Kirti N. Tare²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Physiology, Smt. Kashibai Navale Medical College [SKNMC] and GH, Narhe – Ambegaon, Pune - 41. MS, India; ²Ayurvedic Practitioner, Arogyam Holistic Wellness Clinic, Amrapali Arcade, Vasant Vihar, Thane (West)- 400610, MS, India.

ABSTRACT

Modern medicine is evidence based system of medicine with its high end investigative tools, surgical procedures and continued research at molecular, genetic and pharmaceutical levels. Ayurveda is an intricate system of healing that originated in India thousands of years ago. It is designed to promote good health and longevity along with the treatment of disease. It would be more apt to call Ayurveda a completely natural way of life. But the fact is, there exists a wide gap between these two health care systems. Modern medicine has no replacement, but traditional healthcare providers still form the basis of rural healthcare in India.

This review article stresses the importance and need for integrating modern medicine with the ayurvedic system of medicine. Although it will be a challenging job, but will definitely lead us towards better and holistic health.

Key Words: Modern medicine, Ayurveda, Integrated approach, Holistic health

INTRODUCTION

All of us are aware that the present era is marked by the emergence of many health related challenges like Diabetes Mellitus, Hypertension, AIDS which are occurring like an epidemic throughout the world.¹ Modern medicine is trying to the fullest of its strength to cope up with these challenges with the help of new drugs, newer forms of therapy and latest technologies. But the focus of modern medicine is more towards diagnosis, treatment and prevention of complications. Here, we would like to emphasize the role of our traditional healthcare system i.e. “Ayurveda” in expanding the definition of term “Health,” as not a mere ‘absence of disease’ to a ‘state of complete mental and physical wellbeing’. A time has come to build the bridges between traditional and modern healthcare systems through an integrated approach towards holistic health.

Perspective of Modern Medicine

Medicine is the applied science or practice of diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of disease. It encompasses a variety of health care practices evolved to maintain and restore health by the prevention and treatment of illness in human beings.

Modern medicine applies health science, biomedical research, and medical technology to diagnose and treat injury and disease, typically through medication or surgery.² Medical science has evolved over decades of experimentation which involved lots of hard work. Modern medicine is mainly evidence based. In contrast with the traditional healthcare provider, an allopathic practitioner is more scientific in approach. Whatever he is trying to cure is either visible under the microscope or can be made visible by biochemical reactions in test tubes. Modern medicine “makes it possible for us to draw precise picture of internal workings of the human body, measure tiny metabolic reactions, exchange organs from one person to another and even grow babies in test tubes”.³ Scientifically if one gets sick, it is because he has come in contact with the microbes present in the environment. The goal of modern medicine is to intervene with effective measures of eliminating the source of disease, thus promoting healing.

Modern medicine with its continued on-going research in various fields, has led to remarkable achievements in understanding various disease processes, their causative agents and developing newer drugs and technologies to deal with them. It has successfully reduced the prevalence of infectious diseases

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Mrunal R. Shenwai, Assistant Professor, Department of Physiology, SKNMC, Pune, MS, India;
Mobile: +91-9923444740; E-mail: drsmrunal@yahoo.co.in

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and significantly improved the quality of life of patients with chronic ailments. So we cannot think of holistic health without the help of modern medicine.⁴

But the newly emerging diseases and health problems are still outnumbering the therapeutic efforts. Newer challenges in the form of Diabetes, Hypertension, AIDS, different malignancies, infertility etc. are still a constant cause of worry. E.g. in spite of the billions of dollars spent on cancer research and the availability of the best health care in the world, cancer is one of the leading causes of death in the US and around the world. Lifestyle has been named as one of the major contributors to the incidence of cancer. Although modern science has made some major strides in understanding cancer and its molecular basis, the knowledge about how to prevent or treat cancer is still lagging behind.^{5,6} Several chemotherapeutic, cytotoxic and immunomodulating agents which are available in Western medicine to treat cancer are enormously expensive and associated with serious side effects and morbidity. Though the biology of cancer is much better understood today still, the search continues for an ideal treatment that has minimal side effects and is cost-effective.⁷ Similarly, diabetes and hypertension have emerged like an epidemic in last few decades. These are labeled as lifestyle disorders and once you get them you have to live with them.

So the question is; are we really heading towards 'Health'?

According to WHO "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity".⁸ So, health can be defined as an outcome of multiple factors operating at various levels. Good health permits the optimal utilization of one's physical and mental abilities for one's own good as well as for society.⁹ But the current trend suggests that we are restricting the use of modern medicine to merely identifying physical problems and their treatment.

Failure to diagnose correctly, increased awareness amongst patients about the investigations and treatment options, growing trend of using newer and costlier drugs ignoring their side effects, are all causing a sense of distrust between doctors and patients. Many such patients prefer alternative forms of therapies like Ayurveda. Over a period of years allopathic practitioners have shown a sense of discontent towards traditional healthcare providers. A time has come to fill the gap between these two healthcare systems and for that matter we must try to understand the fundamentals behind Ayurvedic practice.

Perspective of Ayurvedic System of Health

Ayurveda which means, the science of long life, is an intricate system of healing that originated in India thousands of years ago (1500–1000 BC).^{5,10} It is designed to promote good health and longevity rather than to fight disease and was practiced by physicians and surgeons. The two different textbooks one by

"Charaka" is called Charaka Samhita¹¹ which deals with the etiology, symptomatology, pathology, prognosis, and medical management of disease, and the other by "Sushruta" is called Sushruta Samhita¹² deals with various surgical instruments and procedures.

Ayurveda is not only a science of medicine but it would be more apt to call it a completely natural way of life. This can be evident from the basic concepts of Ayurveda.

Concept of complete life: According to Vedas, a human being should strive for four basic instincts in life i.e. *Dharma*(the code of conduct), *Artha*(money, jewellery etc.), *Kaama*(desires), *Moksha*(spiritual end). Acquiring these instincts in a fair way means living a complete life. For this a person needs complete wellness which is provided with the help of Ayurveda. The two basic mottos of Ayurveda are: "*Swasthasya swasthyarakshanam*" means to maintain the health of a healthy individual and "*Aaturasya Vikaar prashamanam*" is to cure the disease of a patient. Complete health refers to physical and mental health. Following the daily routine (*Dinacharya*) as well as seasonal routine (*Rutucharya*) helps to stay healthy physically. The concept of *Sadvritta* meaning personal and social code of conduct can help stay healthy mentally as well.

Composition of body from five natural elements: Our body is made up of *Panchamahabhutas* (five gross elements) viz. Ether/Space (*Aakaash*), Air (*Vaayu*), Energy/Fire (*Tej*), Water (*Aapa*) and Earth (*Prithvi*). Earth and Water combines to form *Kapha*, Fire is *Pitta* whereas Air and Ether form *Vaat*, together known as *Tridoshas*. Similarly the seven types of tissues (*Dhatus*) and three waste products (*Mala*) are the result of the combinations of these five elements. *Tridoshas*, *Dhatus* and *Mala* with their respective properties maintain health and cause illness when get imbalanced. The status of these doshas in the body of father and mother at the time of fertilization determines the body type (*Prakruti*) of the baby which is unaltered till death.

Ayurveda regards every individual as unique so the therapeutic approach is individualistic based on prakruti assessment. The *Prakruti* is determined on the basis of physical signs like complexion, stature, skin type, eyes color, voice, appetite, endurance, bowel habits, food habits etc. Pathological assessment of the disease comprises of causative factors in the form of food (*aahaar*) and daily activities (*vihaar*), the predisposing symptoms, present symptoms, relieving factors, and etiology of the disease. The treatment is advised in the form of medicines, the necessary dietary and lifestyle corrections after a complete Ayurvedic assessment of disease (*Ayurved Nidan Paddhati*). Recent research has tried to identify the inheritance possibilities of human Prakruti by observing positive correlations between specific alleles and Prakruti sub-types.^{13, 14}

According to Ayurveda, the imbalance in the body metabolism or the digestive fire is the root cause of all the diseases. A detailed guide to maintain this balance is described in Ayurvedic dietetics which can prove a complete solution to present life style diseases like Obesity, Diabetes, Cardiac problems. A review article by Priti Garodia et al suggests the ayurvedic approach to cancer diagnosis and treatment and also attempts to reveal how these approaches can be employed in today's world.⁵

DISCUSSION

Current Scenario in India

In India like any other developing country, more than 90% of the population relies on Complementary and Alternative medicine for primary care, particularly Ayurvedic medicine and Yoga.^{15,16} Ayurveda colleges graduate around 20,000 physicians every year to meet this soaring demand.¹⁷ Many of them practice modern medicine as per the needs of the patients although Medical Council of India (MCI) has not included any of the ayurvedic aspects in the MBBS curriculum. This has created a major rift between practitioners of modern and ayurvedic medicines. Recently Government has also allowed ayurvedic physicians to practice modern medicine. This has again created debate and widened the gap between these two healthcare physicians. Keeping apart the ego clashes we cannot deny that physicians practicing traditional systems still form the backbone of rural healthcare in India. Even in urban areas ayurvedic treatments e.g. *Panchkarma* and various dietary and health care products are gaining popularity.

So instead of just debating which healthcare system is better, a time has come to follow an integrative approach for the betterment of our patients.

Challenges

1. To make Ayurvedic key concepts like Prakruti and Panchkarma more scientific and evidence based.
2. Drug trials about the safety and efficacy of ayurvedic drugs.
3. Publication of ayurvedic studies in good quality peer reviewed journals.
4. Collaborative efforts in providing treatment by modern and ayurvedic physicians.

We feel that to bridge the gap, the curriculum should be designed in such a way that it will incorporate the key concepts and treatment modalities of traditional system into modern medicine. Such integration is being done by China in an organized way as well as by US to some extent with their traditional systems.^{4,18} Even in India; such integration has been tried by Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in early 20th century. They have proposed a model where a student

will be educated with both modern and Ayurvedic systems of medicine and it will be up to him/her to treat his/her patients depending upon his/her best judgment and nature of the disease.⁴ But due to lack of Gov. support the process has remained slow and unorganized.

Thus on one hand we have modern system of medicine with all the glamour as well as attention from higher authorities but lacking holistic approach and on the other hand our thousands of years old traditional healthcare system having holistic approach but seems to be in a pathetic condition. We feel that this is the right time to build the bridges between these two healthcare systems to achieve the goal of complete health to all and lead globally in medical science.

CONCLUSION

Every healthcare system has its own limitations and advantages. There are conditions where one system may work better than the other, depending upon the nature and course of illness. Aggressive efforts are needed by GOVT. bodies, AYUSH and MCI to follow an integrative approach which will be based upon needs assessment. Moreover extensive collaborative research using multispecialty network is also the need of time. Modern medicine with its advanced technology and ancient Ayurveda with its age-old techniques if go hand in hand then the day is no longer when India will become a global leader in complete health solutions.

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