

Shifting Paradigm: From Conventional to Alternative Medicines

An Introduction on Traditional Indian Medicines

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Mankind has the right to avail the best that is available in any system of medicine. The proposition of cause and effect relationship by Lister in the 19th century laid the foundation of modern medicine and brought about a revolution in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases. With the advent of antibiotics, diagnostics, asepsis and surgery, emerged a period where the cure of disease and the improvement in quality and longevity surpassed the imagination of all and diseases once thought to be deadly were tamed easily.¹ In this fast growing pace of modern medicine, traditional practices of medicine took a back seat.

Although much has been achieved by the wonder treatments of modern medicine, cure is still not possible for many diseases and treatment is largely aimed at suppressing the symptoms. In addition, use of modern drugs is associated with adverse reactions. Moreover, providing modern medical healthcare across the world (especially in developing countries such as India) is still a far-reaching goal due to economic constraints. Interestingly, the most commonly used drugs of modern medicine such as aspirin, anti-malarials, anti-cancers, digitalis, etc, have originated from plant sources. In the light of these factors, both the health-related policy makers as well as the patients have been advocating the revival of such traditional practices and its scientific validation. In India, the emphasis has been on the revival of older systems of medicines such as Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani. The single and greatest most strength of alternative system of medicine is emphasis on self-healing as the lead approach for improving wellness and for treatment of disease.

Definition of Alternative Medicine

A clear-cut definition of alternative medicine has not yet been established. Eisenberg *et al.* defined alternative medicine as “medical interventions not taught widely at

medical schools or generally available at allopathic or western hospitals.”² In the 1970s or 1980s these disciplines were mainly thought as an alternative to the existing allopathic system and therefore became known collectively as “alternative medicine.” However in developing countries especially in the eastern part of the globe, this is a misnomer and there is little consensus as to whether these modalities are alternative or mainstream in some parts of the region. The alternative medical practices all over the world is disparate^{3,4} and encompasses traditional health care systems.

Shifting Paradigm “From Conventional to Alternative Medicine”

With the increasing super specialization, technology and cost escalation in modern medicine, the element of empowerment, participation in the healing process, time and personal attention has dwindled.⁷ Perhaps this has been one of the most important factors that has contributed in patients switching from conventional to alternative medicine which on the other hand relies greatly on providing patients with understanding, meaning and self-care methods for managing their conditions. The other important reason for the increased popularity of alternative medicine is the adverse effects of certain conventional treatments. In addition, sky-rocketing costs of conventional medicine has also driven the search for alternatives.

Differences between biomedicine and traditional medicine

The two most important principles of all traditional or alternative form of medicines including Ayurveda are the existence of a vital force and holism, which states that nothing can be considered in isolation.⁸⁻¹¹ This vital force in China is designated as “Qi,” in Japan as “Ki” and in India as “Prana.”

While alternative medicine relies on vital force, spirituality and holism, modern medicine is based on a

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different theory. The principle of holistic approach of alternative medicine leads to considering the person as an indivisible whole rather than dissected anatomic parts. As such, diagnosis as well as treatment is primarily on concepts of organ functions and not with their anatomic locations. In addition, it is believed that health maintenance depends on a proper interaction with the environment. Similarly, means of communications with the invisible environment (e.g. meditation or prayer) forms an important part of the therapeutic approach.⁸⁻¹¹

Modern medicine is based on the theory that “physical matter is the fundamental reality and beings, processes and phenomenon are all manifestations or results of matter.”¹¹ Another important difference is that biomedicine considers biological entities more or less as equal to the sum of their anatomic parts and tries to elucidate molecular, physiological and pathological mechanisms that form the basis of biological processes. On the other hand, alternative medicine includes an emphasis on wholeness, the relationships between the mind, body, and spirit and a person’s interaction with the environment. Thus the focus is on determining the internal and external causes of a problem rather than treating the patient’s signs and symptoms. Due to the above inherent differences, techniques and treatments used in traditional systems of medicine are starkly different from modern medicine. The specific goal of therapy therefore is to enhance the body’s innate capacity for wellness and self healing by creating or restoring balance between a person’s physiologic and psychological characteristics and bodily functions. Furthermore, with the aid of modern service some of the

more obscure meanings of Ayurvedic texts and practices are beginning to be understood and evaluated using modern techniques.

There are other ancient approaches from Ayurveda such as oil massage, oleation, purgation, steam baths, special enemas and other procedures for purification; dietary prescriptions, specific postures and physical exercise (yoga), guidelines for behavior, breathing exercises, meditations and so on.

Ayurveda

This form of medicine has been practiced for over 8000 years¹² and is derived from the Sanskrit word “ayus” meaning life or life span, and “veda” meaning knowledge or science, hence it means the “science of life or life span.” Ayurveda not only describes the symptoms, cases and treatments of over a thousand diseases, it also describes hundreds of detailed surgical practices and preventive methods on the levels of mind, body, behavior and the environment.¹³⁻¹⁷ Ayurveda recognizes three humoral concepts — wind (Vata), bile (Pitta) and phlegm (Kapha), and attaches considerable importance to the examination of the pulse for determining the disposition of the three humors.

Ayurveda is broadly classified into two groups. The first group is Brihat trayee (greater triad) comprising of Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Sangraha (also called as Hridaya). The second group is the Laghu trayee (lesser triad) comprising of Madhava Nidana, Sharnghadhara Samhita and Bhavaprakasha.¹⁵ Ayurveda defines disease as “any disturbance in the equilibrium of tissue elements known as Dhatus” which are eight in number.^{13,15,16} This principle is akin to what is called today as homeostatic balance. Dhatus are transformed and transported in the physiology via shrotas, which are the channels for the flow of energy. Disturbances in the equilibrium of Dhatus arise from wrong utilization, non-utilization or excessive utilization of time, mental faculties or sense organs resulting in three types of diseases; endogenous, exogenous and psychic. The eight Dhatus defined in Ayurveda are Rasa (plasma or chyle), Rakta (blood), Mamsa (muscle tissue), Medas (fat), Asthi (bone), Majia (bone marrow), Shukra (sperm or ovum) and Sattva (spirit and mental). The Dhatus arise from Ojas, which consists of two types — ordinary type that exists in large quantity; and superior type found in much smaller quantity. Ojas is present all over the body and is described as being white, unctuous and greasy. Its diminution results in fear, weakness, grief, anger, fatigue, starvation and tirelessness. Optimal levels of Ojas are responsible for strength, power of resistance, containment

and improved digestion. Hridaya is the seat of Ojas but does not refer to the anatomical heart. Walton and Hugh *et al.*¹⁸ have described the equivalents of Ojas and Dhatus with terminologies in modern medicine where Ojas has been correlated to be or equivalent of cholesterol in the modern medicine. The eight Dhatus have also been equated with eight steroid classes comprising of bile acids, cardioactive steroids, anabolic steroids, androgen derivatives, neurosteroids, etc.

Siddha Medicine

This system of medicine refers to principles and practices that originated from a class of Tamil sages called the Siddhas — “perfected” or “holy immortals” and is still prevalent in the south eastern state of Tamilnadu in India. One of the important principles of Siddha medicine is conquest of death or immortality.¹⁹

Siddha medicine is associated with 18 Siddhas (sages) — with Agastyar, Tirumilar and Bhogar being the most important. At the core of this traditional form of medicine is immense faith in miracles of mercurial drugs and prolongation of life through rejuvenating and intense yogic practices. In addition, certain Siddha aphorisms also advocate controlled breathing, convention of mind, mastery over senses and intense meditation.

Alchemy is the origin of Siddha medicine and its roots can be traced back to Chinese alchemy called Taoism and Taoist pathology. However, the range of Siddha drugs is not extensive and various works describe a compendium ranging from 175 drugs²⁰ to 475 drugs.²¹ According to Bhogar even a single drug with dietary regimen can cure several diseases by varying its adjuvant such as honey, clarified butter, milk, herbal extracts, ginger juice, betel leaf juice, hot water, etc.

Examination of pulse and urine are employed by Siddha medicine as diagnostic methods. A Siddha physician by practice distinguishes six pulse readings by placing his fingers on both the wrists.²² The color of urine is also an indicator of the nature of disease.²³ Minerals, metals, salts and herbs used in the preparation of Siddha drugs are mutually compatible. These are also categorized as earthy, watery, fiery, airy or k s ‘ a.

Another notable characteristic of Siddha treatment is rejuvenation or Kaya-Kalpa²⁴ that includes breathing regulation for conserving vital energy of the body, conservation of sperm,

administration of processed mercurial and other mineral derived drugs. Certain plants such as *Aloe indica* and *Edipta alba* have also been reported to be used in Kaya-Kalpa. Muppu, another constituent of Siddha medicine, is a combination of three salts.²⁵ Its constituents and mode of preparation is a closely guarded secret, and it supposedly enhances the efficiency of any Siddha medicine and also engenders Yogic concentration. Astrology and incantation are an integral to the practice of Siddha medicine.^{26,27}

A standardized formulary for Siddha medicine has been devised for 242 drugs in which nearly 100 plants are used along with mercury, sulfur, arsenic, metal gems, salts, shells and several other organic and inorganic ingredients.³⁰ Certain Siddhic drugs have also been evaluated in clinical trials for diseases such as peptic ulcer, amoebic dysentery and hepatitis.³¹

Unani Medicine

As the name suggests, this form of traditional medicine is not native of India but came from Unan, which is now called Iran. However, it is widely practiced throughout India. Unani medicine employs various plants and heavy metals to manufacture drugs using traditional calcination techniques (incorporation of traditional herbal juices in the ash). The traditional physicians claim that these processes purify (detoxify) the metal making the therapeutic agent more effective and safe.³²⁻³⁴

Folklore medicine

Certain sane remedies or the medical wisdom practiced in domestic set-up has been passed on in the form of grandmother prescriptions. This, along with folklore medicine, has always been a part of our life, both as health



promoters and in management of trivial disorders. Moreover, some folklore medicine that is used has been proven to be scientifically correct. Use of haldi (*Curcuma longa*) in relieving aches and pains is due to its anti-inflammatory activity.³⁵ Tulsi leaves (*Ocimum sanctum*) has been shown to possess anti-stress activity.^{36,37} Kernel stone of jamun (*Eugenia jumbolana*) has been shown to be anti-diabetic.³⁸ All these substances when tried by modern techniques have been found to be effective. In Indian medicine, therapeutic procedures employed a large number of articles most of which are commonly used in the Hindu kitchens. This led to the discovery of excellent medicinal properties of herbs, plants, trees and spices, and the dosage and the manner of taking medicines were also devised. These were all very well thought out, tried out, codified and systematized.

Drawbacks of Alternative Medicine

Even the traditional or alternative systems of medicine suffer from certain drawbacks. Since the curriculum of physicians practicing alternative forms of medicine is very often not well defined, tested and certified, there is possibility of quacks practicing such medicine providing alluring and magical cures. More often natural products that are used as drugs are also largely unmonitored and their quality is uncontrolled. Therefore they may vary tremendously in content, quality and safety.³⁹

Conclusion

Indian medicine has come down to us through several routes, which now have unfortunately wiped out due to change in the social structure and rapid advancement. As a result, traditional skills and wisdom have almost entirely disappeared or are in the process of disappearing as the knowledge has not been documented properly or standardized. To add to the woes, whatever that is available in the ancient literature on traditional herbal medicine is not easy to access because of limited availability of texts in a few national libraries. Moreover, this ancient information is given in Sanskrit or in regional languages and the scientific community finds it difficult to understand them. Therefore, these traditional prescriptions and practices are not likely to be sustained by the later generations, if something is not done now and inquiring their background may merely remain as an historical exercise.

There are limitations to both types of medicine, be it modern or traditional. Although the term “evidence-based” medicine is used rather lucidly to approve or disapprove certain therapeutic modalities, the fact whether the patient’s

needs are being met or not should also be taken into account. A patient has the right to receive the best form of treatment, the choice must not be limited by a mutual animosity between the two camps of medicine merely on the grounds of evidence though it is also very important when it comes to informing the patient the goals and limitations of both the therapies and time course of response. Thus, there is a dire need for an open platform for the willingness of both the parties to seek scientific proofs and an obligation to identify and avoid harmful or useless practices.⁴⁰ The goals of medicine, no matter which group it belongs to, are the same i.e. the welfare of the patient. We look towards a future of integrated medicine and hope that research in alternative medicine will help identify what is safe and effective exploring rather than marginalization, and unorthodox medical claims and findings.

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1 In this fast growing pace of modern medicine, traditional practices of medicine took a back seat. In proceedings (2004) ShiftingP, title={Shifting Paradigm : From Conventional to Alternative Medicines}, author={}, year={2004} }. Published 2004.ankind has the right to avail the best that is available in any system of medicine. The proposition of cause and effect relationship by Lister in the 19 th century laid the foundation of modern medicine and brought about a revolution in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases. With the advent of antibiotics, diagnostics, asepsis and surgery, emerged a period where the cure of disease and the improvement in quality and longevity surpassed the imagination. Download Citation | Shifting Paradigm: From Conventional to Alternative Medicines " An Introduction on Traditional Indian Medicines | This article delivers an Introduction on Indian Traditional Medicine. | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate. The main goal in treating cancer is to eradicate it, but if it's not achieved then the treatment is shifted to palliative care, relieving the symptoms and maintaining the quality of living of the patients. The management of this disease including the therapeutic aspects that are to be used are described in the classical text books of Indian system of medicine. The oral health traditions that are formed are given by the traditionally trained physicians of village, folk healers, tribes people, and written on the palm leaves. An English Historical Lexicology would be concerned, therefore, with the origin of English vocabulary units, their change and development, the linguistic and extralinguistic factors modifying their structure, meaning and usage within the history of the English language. Lexicology studies various lexical units: morphemes, words, variable word-groups and phraseological units. We proceed from the assumption that the word is the basic unit of language system, the largest on the morphologic and the smallest on the syntactic plane of linguistic analysis. The word is a structural and semantic entity. Traditional and complementary/alternative medicine has demonstrated efficacy in areas such as mental health, disease prevention, treatment of non-communicable diseases, and improvement of the quality of life for persons living with chronic diseases as well as for the ageing population. Although further research, clinical trials, and evaluations are needed, traditional and complementary/alternative medicine has shown great potential to meet a broad spectrum of health care needs. 16. V. I. An important element in the worldwide trend toward traditional medicine (elements of which have been embodied in "alternative" medicine) has been the prominent reemergence of an integrated science termed. "ethno-pharmacology".