

Traditional Indian Medicine

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ABSTRACT

Nutrition is a basic human need. Dietary supplements and herbal remedies are popular complementary products people take. It is a well-known fact that traditional medicines supplement modern medicine in meeting the global healthcare needs. Traditional Indian Medicine (or Ayurveda) is among the well known global traditional systems of medicine and it is becoming increasingly popular. Ayurvedic drugs are used as food supplements in US, Europe, and Japan. This paper provides an overview of Ayurveda, the traditional Indian medicine.

KEYWORDS: traditional Indian medicine, Ayurveda, indigenous systems of medicine, Asian medical systems

INTRODUCTION

Food is the main source of providing nutritional needs. Health and illness have always been a primary concern of human beings. Every medical system aims to restore those who are ill to health. In India, two parallel medical systems (modern and traditional) exist side by side. Modern medicine is evidence-based, while traditional medicine has not gone through critical evaluation. India is blessed with an ancient heritage of traditional Indian medicine (TIM), which relies on lifelong medication on which patients can depend. TIM has a rich history of its effectiveness. Efforts to regulate TIM are ongoing because of the increasing renewed global interest in complementary and alternative medicines.

India is well known for its six traditional medicinal systems: Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani, Yoga, Naturopathy, and Homoeopathy. Of these traditional systems, Ayurveda is the most popular. About 70 percent of rural population in India depends on the traditional Ayurvedic medicines. These medicines are not only used for primary health care in developing countries, they are also used in developed countries where conventional, modern medicines compete.

AYURVEDIC SYSTEM

Ayurveda means the science of life. It is the science of life of the universe. It takes into consideration physical, psychological, philosophical, ethical, and spiritual well being of people. American Indians regard traditional Indian medicine (TIM) as spirituality.

The Ayurvedic concept originated and developed in India between 2500 and 500 BC.

Ayurvedic medicine is one of the world's oldest medical systems. It is comparable to traditional Chinese medicine. Besides India, Ayurveda is also practiced in Sri Lanka.

Ayurveda has eight ways to diagnose illness [1]: Nadi (pulse), Mootra (urine), Mala (stool), Jihva (tongue), Shabda (speech), Sparsha (touch), Druk (vision), and Aakruti (appearance). The medicine can treat fever, cough, diarrhea, dropsy, seizures, diabetes, tumors, asthma, cancer, anemia, heart disease, leprosy, boils, skin disorders, ulcers, gout, diseases of the eye, headache, and wound.

In traditional Indian society, practitioners of Ayurveda believe that everything is made of five cosmic elements: earth, fire, air, water, and ether. The medicine man is a person of much power and he is regarded as healer, priest, advisor, and arbitrator. He works under the guidance of a guardian spirit and his pronouncements are backed by spiritual authority. It is usually presumed that the knowledge of Ayurveda is given by the gods of a different world. Ayurveda is based on folklore. Curing rituals are mostly private [2].

Many factors must be considered when prescribing or taking ayurvedic medicine. Ayurveda has timings for medication according to the patient's nature, disease, and the condition of disease and most medications are administered after food. Ayurvedic medicines exist in different formats such as liquids, powders, pastes, fermented products, tablets, and medicinal butters. The formats used depends on preparations' efficacy [3].

There are two divisions of Ayurveda: *Swasthavritta* and *Athurvritta*. Within Ayurveda there are eight specialties [4]:

1. Kayachikitsa - internal medicine
2. Kaumarabhritya - paediatrics and gynaecology
3. Shalyatantra - surgery
4. Shalakyatantra - ophthalmology and otorhinolaryngology
5. Grihachikitsa - psychiatry
6. Agatatantra - toxicology
7. Rasayanatantra - geriatrics / rejuvenation therapy
8. Vajeeakaranatantra - sexology / virilification

HERBAL MEDICINE

Traditional treatments include herbal medicines, dietary interventions, and massage. Ayurveda uses herbs, metals (e.g gold, lead, mercury), organic matters, and minerals. Medicinal plants are the major source of drug in TIM. The Indian subcontinent is a vast repository of medicinal plants that are used in traditional medical treatments. Plants are the primary ingredients of Ayurvedic drugs. These plant species are being explored with the modern scientific approaches for better leads in the healthcare. Herbal medicine includes herbs, herbal materials, and products.

Medicinal plants are often used by traditional doctors to treat a variety of ailments and symptoms such as fever, cold, headache, ulcer, diabetes, and cancer. Research effort in traditional medicine has focused mainly on medicinal plants. The World Health Organization (WHO) lists 21000 plants used for medicinal purposes all over the world.

GLOBALIZATION OF TIM

After gaining independence from Britain in 1947, the government of India initiated measures to improve Ayurveda as one of the major health care systems. TIM has gained steady international demand over the years. Ayurveda has spread around the world. Today, Ayurvedic drugs are used as food supplements in many places like US, Europe, and Japan. In many parts of the world, several physicians practice Ayurveda [5]. Several modern medical practitioners are increasingly recommending alternative remedies to patients when modern medicines fail to work or when it has more side effects. Drug combination treatment is increasingly applied in many areas in medicine. The World Health Organization (WHO) has also recognized the importance of traditional medicine in developing countries.

CHALLENGES

Evidence-based or scientific studies on the efficacy and safety of traditional Indian medicines are limited. The major ingredients in most medical products are not clearly stated. TIM has taken only limited steps to scientifically validate the efficacy of its drugs.

Today, Ayurveda is considered pseudoscientific. The practice of Ayurveda is not licensed by any state in the US and most Ayurvedic products are marketed without having been approved by the FDA. For successful promotion of TIM, these problems must be addressed [6]: (1) Quality issues, (2) quality control issues, (3) lack of regulation, (4) need for clinical trial, (5) research and development, (6) unethical practice, (7) protecting the medicinal plants.

CONCLUSION

In India, two parallel systems of medicine (modern and traditional) operate side by side.

Traditional Indian medicine (TIM) refers the diverse health practices and approaches which are related to the beliefs and spiritual remedies. It basically includes perspectives of ceremonies, religion, practices, and medicine. It is a vast area of study that has been investigated in many ways. There is a trend towards increased usage of medicines used in traditional Indian systems especially those which are based on herbal products.

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