



Review Article

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Could Traditional Medicine and Exercise Provide Affordable 'Health for All' and A Cheap Approach to Combat Covid-19 Pandemic?



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Abstract

In 1978 Alma-Ata Declaration – the first international declaration underlining the importance of primary health care that expressed the need for urgent action by all governments, health and development workers, and the world community to protect and promote the health of all people, however, the Declaration has never been treated with an urgent attitude required by all kind of authorities. By the time of writing (May 2022), the Covid-19 pandemic has made a devastating impact on human society with more than 526 million confirmed cases and over 6 million deaths recorded globally by World Health Organization (WHO), and people are clearly paying the price, especially in countries without a quality healthcare system for their all citizens. The article use literature analysis and fact evidence including data from the WHO and some most recent published research results of the current corona virus pandemic to look into the phenomenal that traditional medicine and exercises were employed not only for treating patients with the mild symptom but also for enhancing the health status of the general public - a cheap alternative for the prevention of covid-19, especially there is no effective treatment or vaccine currently available for the disease.

Keywords: Medicine; Symptom; Covid-19; Disease; Ayurved; Lifestyle; Wellness

Introduction

The quest for a healthy life has been an eternal one. The WHO launched its "Health for All" campaign and defined Health for All as the attainment by all peoples of the world by the year 2000 of a level of health that will permit them to lead a socially and economically productive life. However, almost two decades later, this goal still eludes many, especially in the developing countries. The recently concluded Integrative Medicine and Holistic Healing Conference at the National Institute of Pharmaceutical Education and Research (NIPER) from 20-22 September 2019 in Mohali, India was a wonderful platform to explore developing cooperation between traditional and modern medicine practitioners to deliver effective, efficient, and holistic healthcare to the people. In the year 2019, the world population stands over 7.7 billion. Delivering affordable and quality healthcare to such a population base is a Herculean challenge both in terms of policy and practice for the international community.

The cost of poor health to any state or society is enormous. At the start of the present decade, healthcare spending of the U.S is \$3.6 trillion, 17.7% of total budget [1], even so not every

American are covered, whereas it was 9.8% GDP, £197 billion in the UK [2]. While rich countries have the wherewithal to make allocations for their medical budgets, it is developing countries that must bear the disproportionate brunt of poor health. Is there a cheap alternative practice that can be deployed by developing countries to enhance their people's health status effectively?

Traditional Medicine and Exercise Paving the way in Indian and China

The pandemic of Covid-19 since December 2019 has posted a great challenge to the entire global population and governments with no particular cure and vaccine available at the current development stage, as an alternative, traditional medicine and exercise are employed for enhancing people's immune system and preventing the virus outbreak, especially in China and India and both governments believe their long existing traditional medicine and exercises are effective enough to fight the infectious disease. The use of Chinese medicine to prevent epidemics of infectious diseases was traced back to ancient Chinese practice and recorded in Huangdi's Internal Classic.

In 2003, Chinese medicine also used to treat severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) [3]. Moreover, there was a prevention programme which including five traditional herbal medicine formulae were issued by the Chinese State Traditional Medicine Administration in 2009 to tackle H1N1 influenza [4]. For Covid-19, China's approaches of treatment including wearing Chinese medicine sachets, herbal fumigation, and lighter exercises, such as Taiji and Qigong (Baduanjin and Wuqinxi, etc.), especially for those who have not developed serious symptoms, and many provinces also issued prevention programmes with Chinese medicine formulae to tackle the outbreak [5]. Taiji and Qigong are traditional Chinese aerobic exercises, the practice is used for both prevention and treatment at the community level. Even President Xi Jinping concluded during the Expert and Scholar Symposium on 2nd June 2020 "a major feature of this prevention and control the covid-19 epidemic is combining both Chinese traditional medicine and Western medicine, integrating both Chinese method and Western method at the same time".

Xi also pointed out in the same symposium to strength traditional Chinese medicine talent development and the service system to build a capable national team for prevention and treatment of epidemic disease [6]. Ayurveda essentially means "science of life", and its goal is to cure the people who are suffering from physical or mental diseases [7]. Ayurveda's vision of health is more encompassing as health, according to Ayurveda, is "a biophysical and physiological state of equilibrium and a contended state of consciousness, senses and mind". This understanding is more all-encompassing and broader than that of the most modern branches of healthcare today. Can this traditional medicine and exercise be the solution? This ancient system of Indian medicine has greatly influenced all the ancient medical systems of the world.

Indian Emperor Ashoka who had embraced Buddhism promoted the Ayurvedic system throughout the Mauryan Empire and its neighboring countries in the 3rd century B.C. Buddhist monks took Ayurveda to all the countries where Buddhism spread and it reached central Asia, Tibet, China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Sumatra, and many other countries. It travelled eastward and westward through the universities at Nalanda and Taxila respectively. Charaka, one of the principal contributors to Ayurveda had been the earliest proponent of "prevention is better than cure" doctrine and is the first physician who presented the concept of digestion, metabolism, and immunity. His work 'Charaka Samhita' describes the goal of Ayurveda as - Swasthaysa Swasthya Rakshanam, Aaturasya Vikaarprashaman Ch - to defend the health of the healthy; and to counter any pathology.

In his paper, Ayurveda, Lifestyle and Wellness, Prof. Adrian Kennedy of the Institute of Lifestyle Medicine, Harvard while discussing a healthy lifestyle 'swasthavruta' makes an interesting comparison between the past and the present. 5000 years ago. Traditional medicine and exercises in the East, either China or India talk about the importance of pure diet, pure body, pure mind, pure life, and pure devotion, which in the 21st century has

been transformed to balanced diet, moderate exercise, stress management, dependencies management and spiritual health respectively in the West. Recently Singapore also pioneered some good policies that aim to promote traditional medicine. For example, patients are referred for traditional treatments, like acupuncture, by doctors trained in Western medicine. Countries like Singapore aim to integrate the best from traditional and modern medicine and look at those areas where both converge to help tackle the unique health challenges of contemporary times.

In 2015, Tu Youyou of China was awarded the Nobel Prize for medicine for her work in helping to create an anti-malaria medicine. The 85-year-old Nobel Laureate from China doesn't have a medical degree or a PhD, but she consulted the ancient Chinese texts to study how best to extract the compound for use in medicine in the fight against malaria. In China, she is being called the "Three Noes" Winner - no medical degree, no doctorate, and she has not worked overseas. When Tu started her search for an anti-malarial drug, over 240,000 compounds around the world had already been tested, without any success. Finally, the team she led found a brief reference to one substance, sweet wormwood (*Artemisia annua*), which had been used to treat malaria in China around 400 CE. It is to be noted that traditional Chinese medicine like other traditional medicine systems of the world may also be influenced by Ayurveda as it was carried to China along with the Buddhist monks like Dharmaratna, Kasyapa Matanga, and especially Bodhidharma who took Dhamma to the land starting from the 1st century CE onward [8].

China is the only country in the world where Western medicine and traditional medicine are practiced alongside each other at every level of the healthcare system. Traditional treatments include herbal remedies, acupuncture, acupressure, massage, and moxibustion, which have evolved over thousands of years and presently account for over 40% of all health care delivered in China [9]. The combined use of traditional Chinese medicine and exercises with Western medical treatment has been found effective in terms of relieving fever, cough, fatigue, and other symptoms, shorten hospitalisation stay and reduce the rate of deterioration during this current fight against Covid-19 pandemic [10]. According to Chinese state media, "comparative experiments showed that a group of people with COVID-19 who took Jinhua Qinggan, herbal granules developed to combat H1N1 influenza in 2009, got better faster than those who did not take the capsules, and tested negative for the new virus more than two days sooner" [11]. By the same token, India's recovery rate from COVID-19 is over 42%, which is more than that of Spain, France, Italy, Russia, or the U.S. but standing at only 1.3 recoveries to every death. Indeed, its traditional approach to treating patients played an important part in the process.

In India, at the governmental level, the Department of Indian System of Medicine and Homoeopathy (ISM&H) was launched in March 1995, under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. The 9th Five-Year Plan (1998-2002) ensured

its integration with western medicine. The plan also focused on the overall development of Ayurveda ranging from investing in human resource development and preservation and cultivation of medicinal plants to completing a pharmacopoeia and outlining good manufacturing processes. The department was renamed to Ayurvedic, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy (AYUSH) in 2003 and in November 2014 the department of AYUSH became a ministry. However, there remains a lot to be done at the levels of institution, society and individual to mainstream the application of Ayurveda to deliver health and wellness to people. The governments should allocate more funds for research and development, alongside creating necessary infrastructure and conditions that would lead towards innovation and entrepreneurship in the field.

The developments in the field of Ayurveda are very promising. In "first of its kind in the world," a group of Ayurveda doctors and surgeons successfully operated upon an 83-year-old man removing a massive 240g of the prostate, without using antibiotics, the four-hour-long operation in Meerut was conducted on the 1st of March 2016 and the unique thing about the operation was that the surgeons only used anesthesia but no antibiotics were used before, during or in the post-operation recovery of the patient [12]. Traditional Ayurvedic medicines like Malaki, Haridra, Shigeru, Gilroy and Guggul were instead utilized in the process. The team of Ayush Darpan Foundation Trust as part of the procedure. It is to be noted that standard Ayurvedic texts mention medicines, which have significant anti-microbial properties and can be used in surgery and to keep the antibiotics away. Antimicrobial resistance is a looming health crisis we face today, and the use of Ayurveda should be explored in the field by the medical fraternity.

In 2009, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) President Ms. Sylvie Lucas while launching the 54-member body's first panel discussion in connection with the 2009 Annual Ministerial Review theme said: "We cannot ignore the potential of traditional medicine in the race to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and renew primary health care for those who lacked access to it." Over the years, as more research studies show the clinical effectiveness of traditional medicine system, an integrated approach to disease using a combination of Western medicine and traditional medicine becomes a possibility for the future. The need is to have a proper strategy and its careful implementation to provide local and affordable health solutions.

Conclusion

A significant increase in the costs of treating lifestyle-related chronic diseases has necessitated a paradigm shift towards a more holistic approach from the model for health service delivery from a strictly biomedical model. This is an approach that stresses prevention as well as cure and offers integrated services that address the multiple determinants of health. Another area in which Ayurveda has great relevance is to provide cost-effective

and non-invasive alternatives to the patients through Marma Chikitsa. Marma points are the vital areas of the body and their stimulation through regulated pressure application helps in ailments like body aches, faulty spinal alignment, pain in the joints, Frozen Shoulder, Brachial Plexus injury, Cerebral Palsy, Post Paresis cases, Osteoarthritis Induced Disability etc. What is amazing is the fact that Marma is a zero-cost therapy, and Ayush Darpan Foundation is also involved in training doctors across India and South Asia in Marma Chikitsa.

A country like India has over 800,000 knee replacement surgeries every year, and each one costs over half a million Indian rupees (Global Health Strategies 2016 [13]). One can imagine how many surgeries can be avoided, the monies which can be saved, and healthcare provided to patients who suffer because of knee problems without spending a single penny through Marma Chikitsa. China and Indian come up with their traditional medicine and exercises for an alternative solution to complement Western medicine and healthcare systems. Addressing the issue of costs, efficacy, availability, affordability, and side effects. On the one side of the debate is that using traditional medicine is unjustified with no good scientific evidence, on the other hand, promoters claim that traditional medicine has been proven to be effective for thousands of years and safe to use even today. With rising healthcare costs, it makes a special sense for developing countries especially India and China to provide an alternative approach as well as sustained and affordable healthcare to its vast populations.

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