



PUBLIC HEALTH PROMOTION THROUGH AYURVEDA AND YOGA

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Abstract

Good health permits the optimal utilization of one's physical and mental abilities for one's own good as well as for society. This means that health cannot be tackled as an isolated subject of action; there are so many factors affecting it from socio-economic determinants to gender, caste, religion, and other inequalities and these must be addressed if one is to improve people's health.

Ayurveda describes health as 'Swasthya,' which refers to a state of complete, balanced, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. This reminds us to 'United Nations' WHO definition of health (1948) as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. Ayurveda is an ancient Indian system of medicine, which stresses principally on prevention of body ailment rather than simply relieving pathological problems and systems. Ayurveda believes in the treatment of an individual as a whole.

The word 'yoga' is originated from Sanskrit and means "to join, to unite." Yoga exercises have a holistic effect and bring body, mind consciousness and soul into balance. By sympathetic nervous system activity, relaxation can reduce the harmful effects of chronic stress. Many microlevel studies revealed that the changing of lifestyle factors, such as exercise, diet, stress management and sleep quality, can improve underlying biological processes responsible for health and well-being. This paper is an attempt to discuss the importance of Ayurveda and Yoga in the promotion of Public Health.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Health Life Style, Well-being, Yoga

INTRODUCTION

'Health is a multidimensional concept as it refers to the extent of a person's physical, mental, and social well-being. Although the three dimensions of health just listed often affect each other, it is



possible for someone to be in good physical health and poor mental health, or vice-versa. Health is a fundamental right for every citizen as per the constitution and public health is used as an indicator for development of a nation. Good health permits the optimal utilization of one's physical and mental abilities for one's own good as well as for society. This means that health cannot be tackled as an isolated subject of action; there are so many factors affecting it from socio-economic determinants to gender, caste, religion, and other inequalities and these must be addressed if one is to improve people's health.

Health is used as an indicator for development of a nation. The functionalist approach emphasizes that good health and effective medical care are essential for the smooth functioning of society. The conflict approach says that social inequality characterizes the quality of health and quality of health care. People from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to become ill and to receive inadequate health care. The interactionalist approach emphasizes that health and illness are social constructions, physical and mental conditions have little or no objective reality but instead are considered healthy or ill conditions on if they are defined as such by a society and its members.

Ayurveda describes health as 'Swasthya,' which refers to a state of complete, balanced, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. This reminds us to 'United Nations' WHO definition of health (1948) as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. Ayurveda is an ancient Indian system of medicine, which stresses principally on prevention of body ailment rather than simply relieving pathological problems and systems. Ayurveda believes in the treatment of an individual as a whole.

CEA Winslow in 1920 defined Public Health as, "The science and art of preventing diseases, prolonging life, and promoting health and efficiency through organized efforts and informal choices of the society or communities. This definition emphasizes on three key features which are as follows- prevention of disease, prolongation of life and promotion of health. These three features are also emphasized by proponents of Ayurveda like great saint Charak and others. He mentions about the objectives of Ayurveda which indirectly defines public health and its objective. The classical text of Ayurveda described many principles relevant to public health such as infectious disease, immunity, nutrition etc. It concerns mostly with longevity whose



notion is not only limited merely to long lasting life but it compasses all the conditions to live in healthy and vitality to achieve a healthy experience of the life cycle. Thus, in Ayurveda the concept of public health even encompassing all ages, focuses primarily on the individual capacity of healthy ageing intended to complete fulfilling one's life. An ideal health care system as defined by Ayurveda is one which cures a disease without causing or precipitating other illness.

The word 'yoga' is originated from Sanskrit and means "to join to unite." Yoga exercises have a holistic effect and bring body, mind consciousness and soul into balance. In this way Yoga assists people in coping with everyday demands, problems, and worries. It also helps us in developing a better understanding of ourself, the purpose of life and our relationship to God. On the spiritual path, yoga leads people to supreme knowledge and eternal bliss in the union of the individual self with the universal self.

Importance of concept of Public Health in Health Care System

Improvement in the health of public can be achieved only when the principle of public health care is intervened and implements at individual level. This can be achieved through-

- Assessment of current health care services and evaluation of their objectives, whether their objectives are being achieved or not.
- Assessment of the requirement of health care professionals and the public.
- Considering the policies for the availability of cost-effective treatment to all the sections.
- Reforming the health care services from time to time, according to the dynamic needs of the public.
- Educating and making people aware of the major health issues and empowering them to deal with them.

Traditional Medical System: Facts and Figure

- An extensive number of patients with multiple sclerosis resort to complementary and alternative medicine treatments: prevalence of use ranges from 41% in Spain to 70% in Canada and 82% in Australia.
- In China, the top five diseases for admission for traditional Chinese medicine hospitals in 2008 were cerebrovascular accident, intervertebral disc displacement, haemorrhoids,



ischaemic disease, and essential hypertension.

- In India, there are 7857185 registered Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (Ayush) practitioners and an estimated one million village based traditional Ayush Community health workers.

As per the WHO Non communicable disease country profile 2011, percentage of mortality for NCD (Noncommunicable diseases) is 53% which means NCDs (Non communicable diseases) pose a major challenge regarding public health in India.

Role of Ayurveda in Public Health

Majority of these NCD, include metabolic disorders which are a result of faulty diet pattern and lifestyle. In this regard it will not be inappropriate to say that all these disorders need a better life style correction and management which are the basics mentioned in Ayurveda for healthy living. Ayurvedic proponents advocates various life style administrations which are described in Ayurveda texts. Some of these modalities are the concept of Dincharya (daily health promotional activities) and Ritucharya (Health promotional activities during specific season), Aahara (specific dietary regime), Pathya (complimentary of medications), Apathya (contradicting to medications) etc. Many of these modalities mentioned above are the health promotion strategies in present scenario.

Major threats today in society such as diabetes, hypertension, thyroid disorders, PCOD, respiratory disorders, obesity can be prevented as well as controlled by the practice of yoga and with the use of Ayurvedic herbs.

Drug resistance has posed a major problem in health care today. Ayurveda has been used since ages and has never been in trap of this problem. Management of most diseases and disorders in Ayurveda works by healthy lifestyle management and by increasing the satva of the patient through counselling and yoga practices, sawasthavritta, a low-cost regime of personalized healthy conduct fitted to the individual, involving life style, nutrition, self-awareness and good relationship with others and nature. There need minimum of resources and this scheme is very cost-effective also. Moreover, focus on diet and nutrition to be taken in accordance with the respective season has broad impact on body and mind. Implementing above said measures through Ayush practitioners at public health centers will prove a boon to majority of public



health problems.

Panchkarma, which refers to the therapeutic practices intended for cleaning the body is unique only to Ayurveda system of medicine, which since ages has been an answer to many illness, shodana practices like vamana, virechana, shirovirechana and vasti have significant role in Vyadhi like Kushtha, Udarroga, Pandu, Kamala, infertility etc.

Role of Yoga in Public Health – The health of body is of fundamental importance in life. As the Swiss-born physician Paracelsus, “Health isn’t everything, but without wealth everything is nothing.” Yoga helps in preserving and restoring health through physical exercise (Asanas), breath exercise (pranayama) and relaxation techniques. There are many basic exercises which are helpful in reducing back pain, joint pain etc. Yoga helps the body to become more flexible, bringing greater range of motion to muscles and joints, flexibility in hamstrings, back, shoulders and hips. Pranayama focuses the attention on the breath and improve lung capacity and posture and harmonize body and mind which benefits the entire body. Certain types of breath can also help in clearing the nasal passages and even calm the central nervous system, which has both physical as well as mental benefits.

Many authors view yoga as a primary system of exercises for bringing about the relaxation response and for helping to manage modern life stresses- both which have been well documented over the last 50 years. Maintaining health related fitness and managing stress are the leading reasons why most people opt for yoga. Stress management is critical for contending with conditions such as obesity, diabetes and insomnia, digestive problem, and heart disease.

Every disease appears to provide a psychological rationale for the application of relaxation practices. In the case of Yoga, it appears to play a pivotal role in combating stress and inflammatory conditions. Inflammatory conditions are common in most NCDs; chronic stress affects almost every bodily system and can have both a direct or indirect impact on disease. By sympathetic nervous system activity, relaxation can reduce the harmful effects of chronic stress. Many microlevel studies revealed that the changing of lifestyle factors, such as exercise, diet, stress management and sleep quality, can improve underlying biological processes responsible for health and well-being. This paper is an attempt to discuss the importance of Ayurveda & Yoga in the promotion of Public Health.



As noted, earlier NCDs pose a major challenge regarding public health in India and two thirds of deaths worldwide are attributable to NCDs. Statistics currently show that five of seven top causes of death are life style related NCDs – heart disease, cancer, chronic lung disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. These chronic life style diseases are attributable to such factors as poor nutrition, too much stress, a sedentary life style and the consumption of tobacco and alcohol. A yogic life style directly addresses all of these factors. In addition, psychological changes that have an impact on health, a yogic life style also changes behaviour due to the increased mindfulness, body awareness and feeling of well-being that accompany Yoga practice. Overall, increasing evidence from research studies, clinical, experimental, and epidemiological shows yoga to be useful in promoting health prophylactically and enhancing general well-being.

Conclusion

Ayurveda is an ancient Indian system of medicine, which stresses principally on prevention of body ailments rather than simply relieving pathological problems or symptoms. It believes in the treatment of individual as a whole. Proponents of Ayurveda always emphasized the three key features of prevailing public health such as preventing diseases, prolonging life, and promoting health and efficiency of people. The classic text of Ayurveda delineates various principles relevant to the present-day public health practice. Ayurveda is widely used in India as a system of primary health care, and interest in it is growing worldwide as well the global trend of public health problems has got a paradigm shift to be chronic life style disorders and Ayurveda and Yoga are undoubtedly a boon to redress these problems with itsage-old principles. With the recent development of the NRHM (National Rural Health Mission) some of the principles and remedies are being used very effectively to redress the public health problems. Modern medicine has been extraordinarily developed with the amalgamation of technologically in the field of diagnostic, prognostic, and curative procedures, but the simple regimens described in ancient classical texts of Ayurveda are of immense use in handling public health problems faced by the present world today.

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