



Integrative Medicine: Need of the Hour

India enjoys the distinction of having the largest network of traditional health care, which is fully functional with a network of registered practitioners, research institutions, and licensed pharmacies. A resurgence of interest in Ayurveda and other traditional medical systems (TM) has resulted from the preference of health seekers toward holistic approaches and products of natural origin. Owing to the growing recognition both nationally and internationally, there is a need for incorporation of the contributions of these systems of health knowledge into the mainstream to meet the limitations of conventional health care and other unmet medical needs. The most prevalent users of Ayurveda/TM are individuals who have incurable, non-life-threatening conditions that may be chronic, such as neurological disorders, arthritis, etc. The second largest group of users are those struggling with chronic, potentially life-threatening diseases, such as cancer. Both groups turn to Ayurveda/TM for a variety of reasons, such as to improve immune functioning, to improve overall functioning, to increase the quality of life, to cope with side effects from conventional therapies, and to relieve symptoms related to their illnesses. Most therapies are for chronic diseases, such as neuromuscular disorders, lifestyle disorders, allergies, arthritis, insomnia, cancer, and others. These therapies are utilized as stand-alone modalities and also as adjuncts or add-on therapies to conventional approaches based on the help sought for management of particular condition or refusal at the time. Traditional medicine may not be delivering much probably owing to its limitations. In certain instances, the patients are being benefited with management from traditional systems of medicine wherein the conventional system professionals express their inability to offer health care for the same due to one or other reason. When health seekers again approach conventional health professionals with improved health status, the situation certainly ignites them toward the modalities and strengths of traditional system of medicine parallel to that of conventional modalities already prescribed to them. In such instances also, policymakers are emphasized to harmonize the integration of medical systems with the modalities proven efficacious and safe through experiences of physicians endured by a group of experts. This situation demands evidence on core issues, such as safety, drug–drug interactions, and rational use of these therapies.

This situation further demands the health authorities, policymakers, and end-users to adopt suitable guidelines and principles. Certain studies are also needed to examine the feasibility of the integration of Ayurveda and conventional allopathic system of medicine. The areas of osteoarthritis and reproductive health, add-on therapies in cancer care, have revealed the beneficial effects of an integrative approach, particularly with regard to symptom management, reduction of analgesic burden, improvement in quality of life, prevention of complications, etc. The way forward would be the integration of TS with biomedicine through synergy and without losing their own core fundamentals for meeting specific requirements of traditional systems research.



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