



Swine to Corona-The Ayush Reality

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Introduction

The viral epidemics have been constantly striking the human race in the recent pasts. A couple of years back swine flu had created havoc among populations worldwide. Now, corona virus is posing challenge to very much existence of the civilizations. India is not an exception to the grave challenge being posed by the increasing incidence of the viral epidemics. The mandate of the communication is to dispel the confusion whether patients should adopt AYUSH systems of medicines like Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy and Sowa-Rigpa (Amchi) as a treatment option for viral diseases.

As a novel disease knocks the door of the India society, several advertisements appear in electronic or print media offering nature and herbal cures for serious intractable diseases despite objections by Ministry of AYUSH and Advertising Standard Council of India. The situation becomes grave as many self-styled AYUSH physicians claiming 'magic cures' tarnish image of the traditional Indian medicine. Recently claim to cure COVID-19 disease by AYUSH drug and drugless therapies have done harm to the credibility of AYUSH systems of medicines. It is hard to believe that how a remedy can cure a dreadful disease even not mentioned in ancient texts like lexicons and pharmacopeia. The bogus claims only put the genuine utility of AYUSH at a stake.

Viral Diseases in Ayush

Bhutavidya, one of the eight branches has been described in Asthtang Ayurved. Microbes in ancient India were known as bhuta (evil spirits) and specialized treatment were offered under Bhutavidya. Several formulations have been described in Kaumarbhriyta (Pediatrics) in the chapter Grahabhada. symptomatology and treatment protocols of Chickenpox (masurika), small pox (laghu masurika) and rabies (jalasantras) have been mentioned in ancient texts may be virus responsible was probably not known at that time. Swine flu has addressed as Abhinyasa jwara by certain

authors.

Claims, Pharmacopoeia And Formulary

A pharmacopeia is an official document of a particular country mentioning assay, purity and potency of a drug. Formulary on the other hand describes assay, purity and potency of formulations based on ingredients mentioned in pharmacopeia. Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy and Sowa-Rigpa (Amchi) systems of medicine have well-established pharmacopoeia and formulary describing disease indications in which formulation is intended to be used. Irrational claim by unrecognised people is an open violation of norms of Drug and Cosmetic Act applicable to AYUSH.

Essential Drug List of Ayush

The department of AYUSH published essential drug list for Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy as per guidelines of World Health Organisation but hardly a physician or a manufacturing unit is following the conditions laid down in the essential drug list. This document clearly mentions use of a particular formulation in a particular disease.

Despite presence of pharmacopeia, formulary and essential drug list, substandard physicians and manufacturing companies are operating in the domestic market claiming to cure swine flu and COVID-19 is hard to digest. There is a very much possibility of availability of suitable answer from AYUSH but very dedicated efforts are required for searching a cure. This is not possible until or unless the department of AYUSH chalks out a comprehensive plan for initiating research and development for cutting-edge research. The metaphysical approach needed to be converted into evidence based.

The therapeutic potential of AYUSH cannot be

undermined as still these diverse systems of medicine continue to enjoy as healthcare system in India. Genuine scientific publications reporting potential antiviral activity of formulations or herbs must be scrutinized for large scale clinical trials. Countless papers are available showing potential antiviral activity of extracts based on medicinal plants mentioned in AYUSH Materia Medica. If antimalarial drug artemisinin can be discovered from Traditional Chinese Medicine, why AYUSH Materia Medica be explored for searching potential antiviral drugs?

Adopting Ayush for Antiviral Research

Since clinical trial is expensive, the Department of AYUSH can frame policy of clinical documentation of Ayurvedic formulations being used in viral illness either by government or private practice. The Central Council of Indian Medicine and the peripheral institutes must make data public as several patients with respiratory illness visit for consultation. The Central Council of Indian Medicine conducts annual visitation in Ayurvedic institutions must instruct the college authorities to document efficacy of the remedies or formulations particularly in viral illness. Many AYUSH colleges are seeking for NAAC accreditation must make clinical documentation mandatory for future prospects.

Advice to Patients

Dreadful diseases like COVID-19 are posing lot of problems to the medical fraternity. As such there is no specific cure for COVID-19 disease in allopathic system of medicine. If a person is willing to consult AYUSH physician for COVID-19, then a professional consultation by a physician recognized by The Central Council of Indian Medicine must be ensured. The patients are strictly advised not to follow certain unauthorized claims being done on social and electronic media. The Department of AYUSH must generate an immediate advisory mentioning status of AYUSH drugs in the treatment or prevention of COVID-19.

Herbs like Guduchi and Ashwagandha have significant immunomodulating activity in animal research. Withaferin-A present in the leaves of ashwagandha has been shown to have promising anti-influenza property and this research has been reported from China, although preliminary. A study in Germany has demonstrated extracted fraction from camel

urine to be effective against corona and influenza A (H1N1) viruses. These are findings of the published animal studies however human studies are a missing link.

Shadang Paniya and Arsenicum album 30 have been promoted for preventing COVID-19 infection. The Department of AYUSH however advocates use of these remedies under the supervision of experts. Earlier, Central Council of Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) has put advisory for management of Nipah virus. Guidelines were prepared for clinical management of Dengue and Chikungunya. These were welcome steps for boosting the faith of patients wanting to adopt AYUSH as line of treatment. These were however backfired by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and created confusion not among patients but practitioners also.

Some people are advising nasal administration of mustard oil as a wonder remedy for COVID-19. Similarly, sesame oil was promoted for possible remedy for preventing symptoms of COVID-19. These claims have been again criticized and there is no information whether the drugs are being prescribed by qualified practitioners. Further, if the practitioner is qualified, this alone is not sufficient, clinical evidence is of prime significance. This is also a violation of the advisory issued by The Department of AYUSH and action must be initiated against quacks and self-styled physicians for tarnishing integrity of AYUSH sciences.

World Health Organization has categorically stated that at present no cure exist for COVID-19 illness. Whatever drugs have been tried in COVID-19 has not been approved by Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Since, chloroquine is combination with antiviral agents have been used successfully used in curing few cases, medicinal plants with potential antimalarial activity can be one of the options of initiating research in AYUSH systems of medicine but again a hypothesis?

Conclusion

AYUSH systems of medicine are fighting a battle for survival. Claiming cures for destructive diseases like COVID-19 are putting the shelf-life of AYUSH at a big risk. Strict action against quacks must be ensured so that AYUSH survives as a healthcare system.

