

The Emerging Integrative Healing System: Ayurveda

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Ayurveda is an ancient healing art and science and a holistic approach to health and wellness, focusing on improving, maintaining, and balancing mind-body health. The first step in healing the mind and body in ayurvedic medicine is based on meditation. Modern society is fast paced, and more and more stress related disorders, such as anxiety, are very commonly seen in our society. 18% of the population in the United States of America, about 40 million people, suffer each day with anxiety. Anxiety disorders cost the nation more than 42 billion dollars annually. According to National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, 8% (18 million) use meditation techniques, and 9.1% (21 million) use yoga practice to manage their anxiety. Integrating ayurvedic practices in modern society is the key to bringing balance, health and wellness for optimum health. According to Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the leading causes of death and disability in the United States, chronic diseases such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, obesity, and arthritis are among the most common, costly, and preventable of all health problems.

Traditional, complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) constitutes a genre of healthcare practices or services bound together as a class by means of reductio-ad-absurdum logic derived principally from their absence from the mainframe of Modern Medicine (MM) also known as biomedicine or allopathy. Modern medicine, which is based on Aristotelian logic, adopted analytical reductionist-scientific rigor to receive global acceptance. Most of the practices under CAM remain popular; however, these could barely cross the threshold of geographical and cultural locality. In this light, 'integrative' systems approach, which take the best of what is available from both perspectives, without bringing hierarchies or even intentions to undermine any, should be more successful in achieving affordable global healthcare solutions.

Ayurveda is one of the oldest extant health systems in the world with wide acceptance among large segments of the population in South Asia, especially in India. The logic, theoretical foundations and epistemology of Ayurveda are based on the six darshans, mainly the Samkhya and Nyaya-Vaisheshika systems of natural philosophy.

Ayurveda's unique, humane, personalized and holistic approach considers body, mind and spirit along with their relationships with nature. While it receives acceptance and support from the general public, due appreciation from the global scientific and medical community is still to come. Historically, Ayurveda has been a holistic, inclusive, progressive and continuously evolving knowledge system with universal attributes. The integrative approach to health care and cure has been the basic matrix of Ayurveda practice.

Recent scientific studies on various herbs have revealed innumerable healing benefits. For example, ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) has shown anti-stress, anti-carcinogenic, anti-aging, anti-inflammatory, and cardio-protective, thyroid stimulating, anti-diabetic, immunomodulatory, and neuroprotective activity as well as nephron-protective effect; vasa (*Adhatoda vasica*) has scientifically shown anti-tubercular, anti-asthmatic, broncho-dilatory, anti-parasitic, anti-allergy, utero-tonic, wound-healing, anti-ulcer, anti-bacterial and insecticidal activity.

Ayurvedic system of healing focuses not only on administering various herbal preparations, but also adopts various modalities such as: daily routine; seasonal routine; yoga; breathing techniques; meditation; relaxation; proper diet according to season and individual mind-body type; seasonal cleansing and physiological purification methods (Panchakarma therapies); and rejuvenative programs into daily practice to alleviate stress and chronic diseases.

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