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Public Health and Ayurveda

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Abstract

Ayurveda is an ancient holistic system of medicine. It considers how to keep a healthy person healthy and how to eradicate the illness of the patient. In the same way, the objective of public health are also to prevent diseases, cure diseases, and provide long life by improving the quality of life of the person. Many principles related to the public health like infectious diseases, immunity, nutrition etc. are well described in Ayurvedic texts. In today's era, the disease is mainly related to lifestyle disorders, and we can avoid these diseases by following the principles of Ayurveda and if we suffer from a disease then these diseases can be relieved through Ayurveda treatments. Some principles and measures are being used very effectively for the prevention of public health problems with the recent development of the 'National Rural Health Mission' and 'Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram'. There are simple regiments described in Ayurvedic classical texts which are in extreme use as a treatment for the public health problems that the present-day world is facing. So, Ayurveda plays an important role in public health.

Keywords: Public health, lifestyle disorders, disease prevention, health promotion.

Introduction

Building of healthy civilization and consequently of healthy nation needs a healthy person and this can be achieved by an important right of health given by the constitution. The health of the person and the nation's economy with increasing healthcare cost get affected by the social impact of ill health on rise with some diseases. Ayurveda is the oldest medical science of life and human and it surpasses the basic treatment of disease and embraces a wide array of principles and practices which deal with each individual in its entirety. Ayurveda primarily ponders two points on how to keep a healthy person healthy and how to eliminate the illness of the patient and the same objective of public health are also to prevent diseases, cure diseases, and deliver long life by improving the quality of life of the individual ^[1]. According to Ayurveda, the body constitutes Dosha (Humour), Dhatu (Tissues), and Mala (Feaces). Balanced Doshas, Dhatus, Malas keep the individual healthy vice versa the person gets sick. Ayurveda has highlights on Tridosha or fundamental energies (humors), Saptadhatu (seven bodily tissues), Trimala (body wastes), Panchamahabhutas (elements), Prakruti or person's constitution, Guna or quality, Shad-rasa, Agni or digestive power, Srotasa means systems/channels, personalized approach to Nidana/etiology, Chikitsa/treatment, Rasayana/Macrobiotics/life lengthening drugs as well as Yoga ^[2].

Ayurveda gives importance to follow ideologies to in routine life to attain good health. By following Ayurvedic ideologies, one can evade the disease and get rid of it. Ayurveda has an important role in public health ^[3] as many principles like

infectious diseases; immunity, nutrition etc. are described and emphasized.

Being an age old, ancient science which was penned down more than 5000 years ago, in recent years, there is remarkable acceptance of the holistic science of Ayurveda at global level. Ayurveda is armory rich with both preventive and curative modalities and approaches to healthcare, providing all holistic needs of an individual. It guides healthy living with health promotive regimes as well as offers curative therapeutics on safer level.

World Health Organization defines the health with three dimensions. "Health is defined as a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity."^[4]

Ayurveda also defines Healthy person or 'Swastha' with balanced Dosha, Dhatu (tissue system), Agni (enzymes and metabolites), Malakriya (state of excretory functions), Prasanna (ecstasy), Atma (Soul), Indriya (senses), and mana (Mind) ^[5]. If all of these works well, then good health can be maintained. If anything goes imbalanced in this chain of activity then we got sick.

The responsibility for the health of a population falls under the purview of the state and its government which is a concept of the public health. Thus, according to 'Alma Ata declaration' and pledge of attaining "Health for All By 2000 AD", various steps or management is taken by the government to meet the concept of public health. To provide good healthcare to the common mass, remarkable contributions has made by an Ayurveda.

The Public Health, a science and art, focuses on preventing diseases, extending life, and enhancing overall well-being through organized community efforts [6]. It is a multidisciplinary field dedicated to promoting health at the population level. Three significant features are

- i). Prevention of disease,
- ii). Prolongation of life, and
- iii). Promotion of health and it is highlighted by proponents of Ayurveda.

The objective of public health and Ayurveda share significant overlap focusing on disease prevention, health promotion along with improvement of overall wellbeing [7]. The two main focused aims on Ayurveda are one is the fortification of the health of a healthy individual “Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam” (virtue, purpose or wealth, pleasure, and release or liberation from cycle of rebirth), and the second aim is the elimination of disease from which a patient is suffering i.e. “Aturasya Vikara Mokshanam” [8].

Public health primarily focus on following,

- i). Disease control
- ii). Health promotion
- iii). Behavioral approach & social engineering

1. Disease Control

Lack of personal hygiene & environmental sanitation, gives origin to many infectious diseases. So, disease control mainly aims at prevention and control of the infectious diseases. Ayurveda has emphasized on these diseases & their prevention with remedies as ‘Marak Vyadhi or “Jana-pada-dhwansa”. An environmental sanitation attained by various methods like fumigation with herbal medicines, air spraying, sprinkling the water bodies with herbal ashes like ‘Aparajita Dhupa’ which is research established. Purification or detoxification is also advocated for nullification of the effects of environmental toxins from the body as well as the rejuvenating drugs or specific ‘Rasayanas’ are advised. Ayurveda has given an importance to personal hygiene in terms of various ‘Dincharya’ upakramas. Ayurveda has been advised “Na samvrita mukham kuryat kshuthi hasya vijrumbhana” is the present adaptation of the use of the masks. The purification oneself when coming in contact with an infectious person/material as well as after returning home from outside which is the concept of ‘Achamana’. The ways of improving the integrity of the body’s defence at first level with Anjanam (herbal collyrium), Nasyam (Errhine therapy), Dhumapana (smoke inhalation with herbal medicines), Gandusha (oil pulling), Abhyanga (oil massage) are emphasized by Ayurveda at skin & mucosal surfaces to resist the invading microbes.

Health Promotion

Health promotion focuses on health needs at personal level which includes mother & child health service, school health, occupational health, mental health services etc. Ayurveda gives special attention on various health promotion measures for kids along with post natal care which is written in Kaumarbhritya or Ayurvedic Pediatrics. The herbal drugs along with honey and ‘Suvarnaprashana’ are prescribed to promote the gut health & the immune power of the baby. Ayurveda emphasizes on the female reproductive health along with antenatal care, natal care and postnatal care, Garbhasanskar and pre-conceptual preparedness of the parents for healthy progeny, garbhini masanumasik paricharya (monthwise decoctions for various gestational

needs of both mother & baby), menstrual irregularities, other reproductive tract problems. Ayurveda enables the person to tackle day today stresses and yield socially & morally productive life through ‘Sad-vritta’ i.e. the set of code & conduct. Various Dincharya regimes like Nasya, Dhumapana & Abhyanga are advocated in an occupational health to avoid health hazards of respiratory system, skin problems, and hard physical labour.

Behavioral Approaches and Social Engineering

The recent era is of many non-communicable disorders or “lifestyle Disorders”. Ayurveda is a guide for healthy living in terms of ‘Trayopasthambha’ i.e. diet (Ahar), sleep (Nidra), sexual practice (Brahmacharya). Pathya and Apathya Ahar, Viruddha Ahar, Exercise, Dincharya, Ritucharya along with seasonal purification, sad-vritta are mentioned by Ayurveda. It contributes to minimise the modifiable risk factors of lifestyle diseases, malnutrition, obesity, sleep disorders, stress and addictions. The aim of Ayurveda describes curative health, which means a mitigation of disease. All these various therapeutic regimens described in the Ayurvedic classical texts, accounts for three levels of prevention such as primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention.

- Primary prevention emphasizes on health promotion and specific protection which can be achieved by above said modalities.
- Secondary prevention emphasizes early diagnosis and treatment can be achieved by various methods of diagnosis like Darshana means inspection, Sparshana means palpation, and Prashna means interrogation, Dashvidh Pareeksha, etc. with the treatment tools like Shaman (alleviation) and Shodhana(purification).
- Tertiary prevention includes or emphasizes on the disease modification and the limitation of the disability which can also be achieved with the help of various treatment modalities like Shaman Chikitsa, Shodhan Chikitsa, Panchakarma chikitsa, etc.

Ayurveda itself has lots of greatness about the health science, the concept of “Ayu” or age is not just only the number of an individual’s life span. The word ‘Ayu’ in Ayurveda has a great and beautiful classification itself with a concept like ‘Sukhayu’ i.e. happy individuals life, ‘Dukhayu’ i.e. unhappy individual, ‘Hitayu’ i.e. happy life considering community aspect, and ‘Ahitayu’ means opposite to qualities of Hitayu [9]. Briefly the principles and practices of Ayurveda and the principles and practice of public health are upholding or supportive in its way. The diseases mainly related to lifestyle disorders are increasing in today’s era. They can be avoided by a person who follows the principles of Ayurveda. Also, if one can get rid of these diseases through Ayurveda treatment, if suffering from any disease. The strength of Ayurveda to offer public in developed countries like total Health care, Lifestyle consultation, Psychological consultation, Spiritual way of life, Rejuvenation (Rasayana) therapy, Panchkarma therapy which rejuvenates biological systems of the body, Management of lifestyle/NCD disorders, Management of chronic and incurable diseases, Management of adverse and toxic effects of drugs [10]. Lifestyle management in terms of ‘Dincharya’, ‘Ritucharya’, Stress management with the help of good conducts or ‘Sad-vrutta’ and ‘Yoga’, Aesthetics and beauty care, Diet therapy and cooking advice at various level, Management of oral hygiene as well as the care of ear-nose-throat, Prenatal (Jatamatra Paricharya) and postnatal care, Knowledge of sexual behavior and Kamashastra, Child health

care management, and baby massage are the today's demand health care program.

Conclusion

Ayurveda learns the art of living a healthy life by eradicating diseases along with a healthy life whereby a person attains health and longevity. Thus, Ayurveda plays a pivotal role in public Health care program in demand: Lifestyle management, Stress management, yoga, Aesthetics and beauty care, Diet and cooking advice, Management of oral hygiene and care of ear nose throat, Prenatal and postnatal care, Knowledge of sexual behavior and Kamashastra, Child health care management, and baby massage, etc. health. For mainstreaming of Ayurveda at accessible & affordable base, the government has launched the schemes for the public through Ministry of AYUSH. It deals with sciences like Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy. Central Government has launched the scheme like Ayurwasthya for public health interventions. In Ayurwasthya scheme, Diabetes Mellitus, Hypertension, Anemia, Musculoskeletal disorders, Vector borne diseases, de-addiction etc. are some projects out of 67. To cultivate & procurement of genuine herbal drugs, making safe, affordable & effective formulations, Ayush aushadhi gunvatta (quality) and utpadhana (production) is established by the government. Better access is given to Ayush services for the public through Ayush healthcare centers by increasing their number, upgrading them, making the Ayush service available at PHC, CHC, district hospitals. Project 'Drishti' is started for the school going children. Ayush health & wellness centers were started to empower masses, preventive & promotive measures, educate the people to medicinal plants for self-care and management of the ailments. Thus, Ayurveda is a potential healthcare system and in association with the government support, it has been accessible through Primary Health Care to the public.

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