

Integration of Allopathy and Traditional Medicine: New Horizons in Health

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Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) (Acupuncture, Homeopathy, Ayurveda, Naturopathy, Yoga etc) is playing a quintessential role in promotive, curative, preventive and rehabilitative aspects of health and has become increasingly popular in the western as well as in the eastern societies. WHO defines Traditional Medicines (TMs) as the sum total of the knowledge, skill, and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to different cultures used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, and improvement of treatment of physical and mental illness.¹ In some Western countries² around 40% cancer patient to over 80% of patients in some Asian countries³ use traditional and alternative medicine. Around 40% of pharmaceutical products are derived from traditional medicine. Few examples of how nature and traditional knowledge have contributed to modern medicine are illustrated. Widely used medicine Aspirin is discovered from the bark of willow tree, contraceptive pills was developed from the roots of wild Yam plants.⁴ The Madagascar periwinkle was used in Ayurveda as well as in Chinese medicine is the source of childhood cancer drugs vinblastine and vincristine.⁵

Nobel Prize winning drug Artemisinin is now recommended by WHO as the first and second line of treatment for malaria.⁶ Similarly, an ayurvedic practice of exposing babies with jaundice to sunlight corresponds to the modern medical treatment of phototherapy. In many South - Asian and European countries, Acupuncture is regarded as therapeutic modality in modern medicine system. In US, acupuncture has gained popularity since president Nixon's trip to China in 1972.⁷ National Institute of health (NIH) studies have shown that acupuncture is an effective treatment alone or in combination with conventional therapies to treat different types of diseases like nausea caused by surgical anesthesia or cancer chemotherapy, headache, dysmenorrhoea, chronic pain, insomnia, low back pain etc.⁸ and WHO in 2003 has also recommends acupuncture for over hundred conditions.⁹

There is an urgent need of evidence-based integration of allopathic and traditional medicine. It helps to foster earlier diagnosis of disease, shows effective therapeutic results, decrease drug toxicities, improves adherence to treatment recommendations, decrease hospital stay and improve quality of life. In Korea Koryo traditional medicine is fully integrated with allopathy medicine into every level of the health system. Also, in our neighbouring

country China, Chinese medicine is playing an important role in advancing integrative medicine approach by almost 50 years.¹⁰

For well-being of population, this is a good example of traditional or alternative medicine supplementing modern medicines. WHO signed a new multi-million five years agreement with Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India to boost the development of Traditional Medicine. This will play an important role in the globalization of evidence based traditional knowledge and mainstreaming and integration evidence based traditional knowledge in national health system. In August 2023, in Gujarat, India, the new WHO Global Center for Traditional Medicine was established and the first Traditional Medicine global summit launched Gujarat Declaration. Traditional, complementary and integrated health is rooted in the knowledge and resources of communities. In Nepal, it is the first step for health and well-being and integral part of health system. WHO in Nepal, has started the development of new traditional medicine strategy 2025-2034.

Before the entry of Allopathy medicine in Nepal, Nepalese people received health care primarily from traditional medicine practitioners because TMs is affordable, easily available and culturally familiar to general people. Worldwide, all health care workers accept the inadequacy of allopathy medicine in combatting chronic illness like hypertension, diabetes mellitus, thyroid problems, rheumatoid arthritis, autoimmune diseases etc. Nepal is trying to develop an affordable Universal health care. To fulfill this there is an urgent need to follow integrated approach in health care system because in this approach patient is put at the center and tries to address the full range of physical, emotional, mental, social, spiritual and environmental influences which play a crucial role in a person's health. But integration of TMs with national health system must be done appropriately, effectively and safely. This type of integrative approach produce synergistic therapeutic effects, drastically changes the approach towards illness. For this evidence based approach is crucial. The ambiguity in the modern medicine can be explained by the alternative medicine. Hence, the allopathic medicine should go hand in hand with alternative medicine for better upliftment of the medicine as a whole.

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