

Rising demand of traditional medicines in modern world

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Traditional systems of medicines always played important role when it comes to meeting the global health care needs. Originated in India, they are continuing to do so at present and shall play a major role in future as well. This Indian system of medicine has unique distinction of having six recognised systems which are Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani and Yoga, Naturopathy and Homeopathy.

According to Dr. Manoj Nesari Joint Adviser (Ayurveda), Department of AYUSH, “There is rising trend towards Ayurveda, Unani and Yoga and other systems of Indian origin. The international day of Yoga that is recently being organized by Prime Minister have certainly lead to steep rise in people to go for the Yoga. So there is now more thrust towards Ayurveda system and others.”

Commenting on the same, Dr Inder Kasturia, Consultant Physician & Wellness Expert, Aakash Healthcare, “Yes, traditional medicines are used worldwide for treatment of various ailments. There are a large numbers of people who still believe in alternative or indigenous medicines, all over the world, despite lack of any scientific evidence in favour of it.”

Market Scenario

Demand for herbal products worldwide has increased at an annual rate of 8% during the period of 1994–2001, and according to WHO forecast, the global herbal market would be worth \$5 trillion by the year 2050. As of today, Europe and the United States are two major herbal product markets in the world, with a market share of 41% and 20%, respectively

According to one research published in International Journal of Business and Management Invention, "While reliable information on industrial activity in this sector is not readily available, it is estimated that the annual total market for the products of Indian systems of medicine is of the order of Rs. 5000 Crores in the domestic market and around Rs. 500 Crores in exports. Both in turn-over and in the number of units, Ayurveda constitutes over 85 % of the total, which is followed by Homeopathy, Unani and Siddha. In the case of the number of Hospitals, Educational Institutes and Practitioners, the same order prevails. Of the 7000 Units, only around 35 have sales of over Rs. 5 Crores per annum, the majority of the balance are in the range of Rs. 50 lakhs to Rs. 1 Crore.

In another report by Ken Research, "The wide spread use of herbal medicine is not restricted to developing countries, as it has been estimated by various that 70% of all medical doctors in France and German regularly prescribe herbal medicine. The number of patients seeking herbal approaches for therapy is also growing exponentially. With the US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) relaxing guidelines for the sale of herbal supplement. The market is booming with herbal products. As per the available records, the herbal medicine market in 1991 in the countries of the European Union was about \$ 6 billion (may be over \$20 billion now), with Germany account for \$3 billion, France \$ 1.6 billion and Italy \$ 0.6 billion."

Traditional medicines especially Ayurveda gained a lot of popularity in the 20th century among developed as well as developing countries. However with discovery of antibiotics like sulfa drugs and penicillin they lost their demand. But once again due to lack of cure for chronic diseases and side effects of conventional medicines, India and other developed countries started looking towards Ayurveda for treatments to restore the wellness scenario in the country.

Dr. Shridhar Aggarwal, Dr. Aggarwal's Ayurvedic Panchakarma & Research Centre believes, "There are instances where modern medicine has no solution for a ailment but definitely traditional line of medicine has cure like kidney failure, heart blockages. Modern medicine goes for dialysis and transplant in kidney patients, or stunting and surgery in heart ailments. But there are herbs that can help repair kidneys, clear heart blockages."

Commenting on the same, Dr. Manu Jaggi, Chief Scientific Officer of Dabur Research Foundation said, "Yes, alternative medicines are now being used extensively by all strata of the society both among rural and urban masses. While the growth of western medicine has slowed down in the last decade or so, the alternative medicine has picked up momentum during the same period."

Factors like concerns over side effects of synthetic drugs and a need for more humanistic ways of treating the illnesses have led a majority of the people in most industrialized nations to move toward traditional and complementary medicines.

"Developed countries are moving more towards the traditional medicines as the age expectancy is more in developed countries and people are more aware of limitations and adverse effects of modern medicines but that is not the right approach, for instance the herbs March Huang (Ephedra) is traditionally used in China to treat respiratory congestion. In the United States, the herb was marketed as a dietary aid, whose overdose led to atleast a dozen deaths, heart attacks and strokes. In Belgium atleast 70 people required renal transplant or dialysis for interstitial fibrosis of the kidney after taking herbal preparation made from the wrong species of plant as slimming treatment.", added Dr Kasturia

Safety status

Traditional system of medicines are having some valuable elements but inevitably they also contain some ingredients that are no longer useful and can lead to side-effects. Therefore, safety is still a primary concern for this system. Right quality of ingredients and no contamination or adulteration are two aspects of safety evaluation.

Dr Amitabh Parti, additional director, internal medicine, Fortis Memorial Research Institute said, "First an awareness needs to be created where Traditional medicines is NOT to be attempted before we consider safety. Secondly the process of standardisation of traditional medicines including packaging, storage, dosage and dispensing are lacking protocols and guidelines. In addition the traditional medicines are –OTC products (over the counter) so far imparting a false sense of safety to the consumer."

"The natural medicines are not completely safe. Their pharmacological properties are not yet tested in human beings as controlled trials, and many patients who use indigenous medicines for a long time develop serious adverse effects on liver and kidney, and this has been observed by many gastroenterologists and nephrologists during their practice.", added Dr Kasturia

There is still a wide disparity in availability of medicines between cities and villages. The methods of cure like Yoga, massages, traditional and herbal therapy are gaining popularity and promise to be the next big thing in the medical and wellness industry. Yoga centres are growing at a faster rate along with herbal spas that offer herbal treatment. All this combined with recent trends of increasing acceptance of natural medication accounts for a huge potential in the up and coming times for Ayurvedic products. Also, this industry is recession proof and it reaches out to a large number of population.

Research and Development

Apart from major amount of research on traditional medicines that is conducted by AYUSH, there are some well-maintained research centres in India like the research Centre of Dabur which is one of the oldest and largest Research & Development institutions in the country focuses on research on traditional systems of Medicine, especially Ayurvedic research. However it is not yet in synchrony with the rising demand of the products.

“Various initiatives like celebration of first National Ayurveda day, Ayush also initiated programmes for prevention and control of Diabetes and NCDs. Because of this people are now aware about the system, they know why and what should be taken from this, various Ayush institutes are now running for research and development in this area.”, said Dr Nesari

“Current scenario of research and development is very slow and inadequate; it requires government support and lots of funding to make this investment fruitful for the patients. Declaring it positive or negative without adequate data will be inappropriate. Cameroon government is doing a lot in the field of research and development of indigenous drugs but there are requirements of W. H. O. interventions to get right direction and guidelines to take the mission forward.”, said Dr Kasturia

The worldwide changing healthcare environment is in need for a comprehensive policy review of traditional, complementary and alternative systems of medicine and for individual nations to share information about their experiences with policy, legislation, regulation, research, development, financing, training and professional development, quality control and safety regulations of these systems of medicine.