

Why Do We Need an Integrative Approach to Solve the Health Problems in the Modern Society?

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Introduction

The human species has existed for thousands of years. Throughout all these times, folk medicine has evolved, effectively to overcome the diseases and conditions caused by life. Our modern medicine has been accepted and developed only in the last 250 years,^{1,2} but is the prevailing paradigm in many if not most, countries. At the same time, there is a strong practice of traditional medicine, which is also becoming more and more recognized by science and practitioners of modern medicine. What can the two systems gain from integration? What are their weaknesses and strengths -and above all, how can patients recover from disease and how can integrative medicine save money?

Challenge

Today's society faces major challenges when it comes to ill health. Pollution, depleted soils, pandemics, mental illness, war,³ and rampant rates of worsened health when it comes to non-communicable diseases, not to mention the galloping health care costs as a result of increased rates of diseases and failure of treatment. The winners are the manufacturers of medical products, and the losers are the patients, society, and the planet. Science has been the paradigm for the last 300 years, and traditional medicine has been pushed back and, in many cases, also been regulated by law and forbidden to use.

– can we find the answer to health in the ancient medical traditions combined with modern medicine with a scientific approach?

Ayurveda

Ayurveda is a universal holistic medical system developed in India over millennia. The approach to health

in Ayurveda was, at that time, an accepted science recognizing the human as a whole: body, mind and soul.⁴ Over thousands of years, it has been practiced, refined, and followed up through the interaction between the patient and the Vaidya.

As in all the world's ancient shamanic practices, the Ayurvedic medicine system is based on the knowledge or doctrine of the five elements. This explanatory model forms the basis of man's interaction with nature. The health of the planet is the health of man.

The five elements describe not only the body constitution and characteristics in a person but also the functions of our body. Furthermore, the five elements make up the doshas Vata (space and air), Pitta (fire and water), and Kapha (water and earth). The simple explanation is that when disease happens, there is an imbalance in the doshas, and health is our natural state that occurs when the doshas are in perfect balance. Every person has his or her own unique "set" of doshas but gets out of balance because of lifestyle, genome, and environment, and thus disease can occur.

When we approach a patient from an Ayurvedic perspective, it is always every unique patient's certain constitution that is in focus. A person can have a quality of either Vata, Pitta or Kapha, or a combination of them. Ayurveda aims to understand the root cause of the problem through a precise and systematic approach, where the patient's entire history is evaluated based on a holistic perspective. Once understood what has caused the disease, treatments can be given to restore the balance. The treatment can be through different treatments such

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as massage techniques, cleansing techniques/detox, breathing exercises, yoga poses, herbal medicine, and the integration of new healthy habits such as diet, exercise and recovery, and the holistic approach addresses all three aspects of the body mind and soul. The point is to teach the patient about their own constitution but also how to heal and - in the best of worlds, balance long before illness occurs. The mental state of patients is described in terms of the more subtle properties of sattva, rajas and tamas, and is also something that is considered during a consultation.

Something really unique about Ayurveda is its ability to recognize six stages of disease.⁵ Every of these steps are precisely described and gives specific symptoms. It is only in the last two stages we can have a diagnose if we go to modern medicine. That means If we can learn to interpret the body's early signals, there is a good chance that long-term chronic conditions can be avoided – if balancing is done at an early stage.

The criticism of traditional medicine often arises due to the perception that it lacks robust scientific evidence supporting its efficacy and measurable outcomes, a contrast to the rigorous standards upheld by conventional medicine.⁶ Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of evidence-based practices in healthcare, and the lack of such evidence for many alternative therapies can fuel skepticism among patients and healthcare professionals alike.

Safety concerns also contribute to skepticism, as some alternative treatments may carry risks due to inadequate regulation or improper use. Historical bans on certain traditional remedies underscore the potential dangers associated with unchecked practices. Furthermore, the term “hocus pocus” is often used pejoratively to describe alternative therapies perceived as relying on mystical or pseudoscientific principles, further eroding confidence in their effectiveness.

In many countries, traditional medicine's lack of standardized regulation and absence of recognized authority certification add another layer of uncertainty. Without clear guidelines or oversight, patients may struggle to assess the qualifications and competence of practitioners offering alternative treatments. This ambiguity can exacerbate doubts about both the safety and efficacy of such therapies.

However, it's essential to recognize that expertise plays a crucial role in mitigating the risks associated with alternative medicine. Knowledgeable practitioners can provide informed guidance, helping patients

navigate the complexities of different treatment options and minimizing potential adverse effects. Moreover, patients may seek out alternative therapies precisely because they perceive conventional medicine as lacking in individualized care and holistic approaches to health. Patients expect personalized attention and a more comprehensive understanding of their health needs. This demand for excellence underscores the need for rigorous training and accreditation within the alternative medicine field, so the patient can be ensured that practitioners meet recognized standards of proficiency and competence and to find clarity of what the outcome of the treatments can be. Traditional medicine has survived despite its challenges for the simple reason, -it works.

Modern Medicine

Modern medicine is, often referred to as allopathic or conventional medicine, is renowned for its evidence-based approach, rigorous standards, and technological advancements.⁷ It has significantly advanced diagnostics, treatments, and surgical procedures, leading to remarkable achievements in healthcare.

Though there has been significant progress in medical research to understand the human body, there are still limitations to effective and timely treatment of the diseases. Not all treatments and medications available are equally effective for all patients. Some treatments only work for certain patients, while others have a limited effect. This often depends on the genetics and lifestyle of the patient. Drugs used may have side effects.⁸ Moreover, the overuse and misuse of antibiotics is a growing problem in healthcare as it limits the effectiveness and emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Modern medicine is for acute treatment. In recent years, vaccines have been used for the prevention of many infectious or infection-based diseases. However, modern medicine in practice is less geared to prevention. In recent years, clinicians and practitioners of modern medicine have recognized this shortfall and put focus on prevention. The focus on prevention recognizes the usefulness of other kinds of medical cultures.⁹

Allopathic medicine medical education might benefit from incorporating a broader perspective of health and disease. By teaching future doctors about the importance of investigating the root causes of illnesses, medical schools can empower the system to provide more comprehensive care to patients. This could involve integrating courses on nutrition, stress management, and lifestyle interventions into the curriculum alongside traditional medical teachings.

Furthermore, fostering a culture of curiosity and inquiry within the medical community is essential. Doctors should be encouraged to explore the underlying causes of diseases rather than simply accepting symptom management using drugs as the norm. This could involve promoting interdisciplinary collaboration and encouraging doctors to stay updated on emerging research in fields such as functional medicine, epigenetics, and integrative healthcare.

Both systems have their strengths and weaknesses -is the criticism relevant and true? Maybe the solution is reaching out with a curious mind, approaching each other with a willingness to learn and to see what can happen when we combine both sciences.

What is integrative medicine?

Integrative medicine refers to the development and integration of evidence-based and practiced knowledge from various alternative medical traditions to complement the established (allopathic) medicine.¹⁰

The integrative approach is a platform where combining modern medicine with traditional practices, is emerging as a promising paradigm in healthcare, offering a holistic approach to patient care. By combining the strengths of both, it seeks to provide comprehensive and personalized care that addresses the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of health. Integrative practitioners aim to integrate evidence-based treatments with holistic modalities such as nutrition, mind-body therapies, and lifestyle interventions. One of the key advantages of the integrative approach is its focus on patient-centered care and empowerment. By offering a diverse range of treatment options tailored to individual needs and preferences, patients are actively involved in their healing journey. Where allopathic medicine has failed due to the treatment of non-communicable diseases and because of the galloping costs, Ayurveda offers solutions that are both efficient and affordable. Here, we find well-documented clinical trials and research. Perhaps this can be even more effective using methods from modern medicine.

Moreover, integrating traditional practices can enhance cultural competence and promote health equity

by acknowledging and respecting diverse healing traditions. The integrative approach can bridge the gap between modern and traditional healthcare. The challenge in healthcare today needs a new approach, a platform where both systems combine the best practices and where we meet with a curious scientific mind. After all, in the best condition, we leave space for the unknown to guide us to new inventions, which is necessary for the new health paradigm that needs to take form in the years to come.

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