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Changing the 'old' face of Ayurveda: Need of time

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Abstract

Ayurveda is an ancient science. It is in an appropriate way, called as 'science of life'. It has roots in Indian culture. The science has somewhere lost its identity in its own place, India, though it is emerging as a new system of medicine in foreign countries. Other than being ancient and so called 'old' science, there are many other problems that come in the way of mainstreaming of Ayurveda. These problems must be solved in order to find a way to represent our science in front of public as eternal one. In this article, authors have discussed some of the issues and tried to find their solutions. The issues emerge from various fields like the curricular level, marketing strategies, standardisation, government authorities, higher level bodies and many more. With time, they can be solved and we can emerge again as a new face of healthcare system.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Mainstreaming, study pattern, drug standardisation.

1. Introduction

Present era is advanced and competitive. In this competitive world Ayurveda is trying to establish itself as an eternal science. Changes in life style, food habits, work load, speed of life etc. in present scenario demand a lot of change in Ayurvedic system of medicine. To withstand in this competition and to achieve goals many changes should be done in the present system and rejuvenation should be the main aim of this change.

We will now discuss the issues in the mainstreaming of Ayurveda and their solutions. Many of the issues are well known, but ignored. Some of the issues, though difficult to digest, are true hurdles in the mainstreaming process. The process demands involvement at all levels like academics, private practitioners, governing bodies, pharmaceutical industries etc.

2. Loopholes in The Study Pattern

Many students get admitted for BAMS course because they cannot do well for MBBS which is unfortunate, but truth. They enter with expectations of becoming a 'Doctor' and get confused with what they are introduced with. The basic syllabus contains basic principles of the science that are very old, though eternal and are tough to be understood just after passing modern science. The documentation of knowledge in samhitas is very complex and demands high perception levels to understand. Such level of intellect is not expected with everyone^[1]. Books that will explain these basic concepts in a student friendly way are not available. There are no proper text books that will explain same concept in same way to every student. Moreover, students study same concepts in every year under different subjects. There is no much enhancement of knowledge as the course progresses. Also, at the time of various selection exams after graduation, the level of questionnaire is same at all places and at all levels. No practical questions are asked at higher levels, even for selection of medical officer. The matters of conflicts between various samhitas which should be solved, arise as questions to be asked for entrance examinations..!

This is a big issue to be solved in order to keep students, the vaidyas of tomorrow confident about the science they are learning. They should have clear concepts about with what they are supposed to spend their whole life. The syllabus should be arranged in a manner that will make the basic concepts of students crystal clear. Therefore it has become must and need of the day that there must be a book that would bring all the scattered information from various corners of all samhitas and explain them in a systematic manner so that the present generation would understand the information given in the science. They should gain proper knowledge of related sciences as well. All concepts and conflicts should be cleared and approved by senior authorities after mass discussions. This can be done with incorporation of all respected practitioners and sharing of their knowledge for authentication of Ayurveda. It is important to set proper guidelines to students for understanding siddhanta, diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

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Authentic text books should be published under the supervision of governing bodies. Syllabus should be revised after specific intervals and new researches incorporated in it. More practical things should be included and impractical issues kept aside for knowledge purpose only. The current curriculum of BAMS does not include the relevant and essential topics like laws governing the intellectual property rights, patenting procedures, basic methods of standardization of medicinal products, fundamental principles of evaluating the toxicity of the medicinal products and basics of pharmacovigilance. Experts in phytochemistry, pharmacognosy, pharmacology, biotechnology and other relevant fields may be appointed in teaching institutions as teachers to teach these topics [2].

3. Lack of Refreshing The Knowledge

This is again one of the important issues. Being in a profession dealing with public health, it is quiet demanding that knowledge of professionals and academicians be refreshed at regular intervals. It is seen that people of our stream rarely posses knowledge regarding recent advancements. We feel immense pleasure in discussing greatness of Ayurveda among ourselves only. Nobody is bothered about how much people outside our circle count us. Governing body is also not concerned about practices outside the academic sections. In addition to these there is no compulsion for teaching faculty to undergo regular CME programmes. Further there is no authentic body to regulate CME programmes and bring all updated information to academic zones. No regular workshops are carried out to refresh their knowledge with current researches, so that it will reach up to the students. Due to all this, Ayurveda is failing to give up its image as a non-scientific hypothetical system of medicine and to tune up with the modernised society.

Though it seems to be difficult to bring in force, it is important that renewal of registration for practice should be compulsory at a definite interval and should be done only after qualifying exams. The exams should be based on practical applicability of knowledge and also on recent researches and advancements. Training programs and workshops may be required to be introduced for Ayurvedic academicians, where, training may be given in planning the research protocols, preparing the research projects and in other various areas of research methodology [2]. Regular CME programmes and attending seminars must be a compulsion for academic people.

4. Authenticity and Standardisation of Drugs

Across the globe, Ayurveda is emerging as a traditional healing system, but it is not gaining popularity as per its level. It is counted in foreign countries along with additives to food products which is very unfortunate. In spite of power of Ayurveda in curing major disorders, it fails to prove its efficacy globally. Questions on safety and efficacy of Ayurvedic products are also being raised [1, 3]. The main issue is with the faithfulness of Ayurvedic preparations containing heavy metals. There are no standards properly set that are followed by all manufacturers. Whichever are established, they are not followed by all industries and that's why standard drug preparations are not available. Any doubt on the safety of a preparation will lead to rejection of that preparation at the regulatory level. In 2004 December, Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA) published a research paper, which concluded that one of the five Ayurvedic Herbal Medicine Products (HMPs) produced in South Asia and

available in Boston South Asian grocery stores contained potentially harmful levels of lead, mercury and/or arsenic. The paper also suggested that the users of Ayurvedic medicine may be at risk for heavy-metal toxicity, and testing of Ayurvedic HMPs for toxic heavy metals should be made mandatory. National Policy on Indian Systems of Medicine and Homeopathy, 2002 has also admitted that the safety, efficacy, quality of drugs and their rational use have not been assured in India. This document states that there is no assurance whatsoever that formularies and pharmacopoeial standards are being followed by the Indian Systems of Medicine drug manufacturers [4].

Complete satisfaction that a medical preparation is safe to be dispensed to patients is the prime concern of regulatory bodies around the world. It is important to prove the safety profile of Ayurvedic preparations to the world in order to increase their acceptability. To achieve that, proper SOP norms should be set for quantity, method of preparations for all types of preparations that are accepted widely with minimum flexibility. The norms should be strictly followed in order not to affect the safety profile.

5. Job Opportunity for Ayurveda Graduates

Ayurveda is said to be helpful in achievement of the Trivarga that is Dharma, Artha and Kama. But in present era, rather the stage of life in which we complete the graduation in Ayurveda, demands more for the 'Artha' factor. The job security for Ayurveda graduates is very less as compared to those in other fields. There is less number of vacancies for medical officers, research officers, teaching staff as compared to the number of students completing graduation and postgraduation per year. This is one of the important reasons why students select Ayurveda not by choice but by force. Most commonly, they do so because they have no other option to become a 'Doctor'. At the edge of completing the degree or P.G. course, students are most of the times frustrated as they are not sure with availability of the ways to earn their living. Many a times it is difficult to start with private practice alone. It takes an ample amount of time for proper establishment so as to be enough to meet the financial requirements of a family. Students perceive this problem to be a more serious one in comparison to teachers. This indicates that there is a considerable level of career-related anxiety among students. This anxiety is noticeably less among teachers because they are already into a job [2].

Number of jobs for Ayurveda graduates need to be increased at all levels. Government is required to look into the matter related to the creation of job opportunities for BAMS graduates in certain departments like Railways and Defence. In teaching institutions too, some posts like tutors and medical officers may be created for BAMS graduates. Ayurveda may be included as an optional subject in the entrance examinations leading to Indian Administrative Services (IAS) just like modern medicine [2]. If the quality of education is improved, some job opportunities may open up in research institutes and in other places in the health care industry as well.

Private sector can also be encouraged in order to invest in various fields of Ayurveda to help generate vacancies. We will discuss about this in the very next para.

6. Incorporation Of Private Sectors

All the responsibility of mainstreaming cannot be put on the head of government but it is important to increase the incorporation of private sectors. Only government jobs cannot

be sufficient to increase the popularity of Ayurveda but it is just a supportive measure. There are a very less number of big and well established Ayurvedic treatment centres all over the country that provide all types of facilities to the patients. NGOs are also interested more in developing hospitals providing Allopathic treatment, which play a major role in health sector. In a government setup, people are less concerned in maintenance of standards and are thus unable to attract people from middle class and higher socio economic status. The thing is related more to the identity of system in the group of rationalist people rather than to money.

There should be establishment of private hospitals or treatment centres that provide Ayurveda treatment. The centres should be well maintained in order to attract more and more people from country and abroad. The centres should be well established, providing care for all types of patients, all under one roof. Emergency care should be available as well.

Ayurveda is being seen as a rich resource for new drug development by modern day pharmacologists [5]. Pharma industries should be encouraged to invest in the Ayurvedic drug preparations. This will help in increased production of standard drugs and more researches in the field of pharmacy. This will help in many ways. More and more standard drug preparations will be available to be prescribed. This will solve problem of standardisation faced abroad by our preparations. As the companies will try not to damage their established image, they themselves will be responsible enough to maintain the authenticity of drugs. Along with traditionally described drugs, proprietary medicines can be invented through such industries that will help to widen the boundary of field of research. Along with research field, new industrial establishment will itself be helpful in generating jobs at various levels.

Cultivation of herbs can also be encouraged through private sectors so that more herbs are available for pharmacies. This can generate job opportunities in the agricultural field as well. Also, due to increased availability of good herbs, pharmaceutical industries will be attracted more towards Ayurveda.

7. Lack of Organisation and Conversation at Various Levels

The whole world of Ayurveda is divided into various levels, like the students, academicians, research workers, practitioners, professionals, and people from governing bodies. There is no proper source of communication between all these levels so that there can be sharing of knowledge at various levels. In ancient period also, Sambhashaparishads were carried out to meet this purpose [7].

This challenge is posing a major threat to Ayurvedic science. There are many practitioners those have a thorough knowledge of Ayurveda and know how to apply it in this period of time. There is a tendency of some senior consultants not to share their special experiences in practice with their juniors. Still, many of them are eager to share their secrets in practice. Even there are some students who are thirsty for knowledge and not merely for a college degree. But due to communication gap, the sharing of knowledge faces many problems. Many researches are going on at various levels but there is no proper platform to keep them in front of all. Many important concepts need to be cleared wherever there are disputes between two streams. Also, there is a general tendency towards agreement that Ayurvedic academicians do not figure anywhere in authoring the scientific and evidence-based papers in reputed

international journals and they do not voluntarily participate in international platforms to present their research data [2].

Common platforms should be increasingly created where people in all levels can meet and share their knowledge with each other. They may be in any form like seminars, CMEs, research journals, social media, news media etc. Everyone related to the field should be encouraged to share their experiences through the media.

8. Lack of Awareness in General Public

Finally what we call as a stream is the general public. We are what they recognize us. But unfortunately, ours is not a famous healthcare system. Till date, a major bulk of people never considers Ayurveda as a science. This is obviously due to lack of awareness and communication with the general public. People in today's era want quick relief from ailments where Ayurveda lags a little behind.

It is most important to convey the various aspects of Ayurveda to the general public. It can be done through various health camps, creating awareness through mass media. It should be presented in front of people in a way that it proves to be most practical and easy to be adjusted with daily routine.

It is true that modern medicine offers prompt relief; rather it is the only option for medical emergencies. But apart from that, Ayurveda has many additional advantages that can be focused in order to gain popularity in general public. Health promotional aspect is one of them especially in these times when people are encircled with lifestyle disorders. Ayurveda aims towards maintenance of health of a healthy person. This aspect is many times overlooked. Ayurveda has an advantage over other health systems as such type of regimes are described only here. If we consider the importance of this aspect, we can not only play an important role in creating a healthy society but also can make Ayurvedic science gain more importance in the society over other health systems.

People in this era are much conscious about health maintenance. If this aspect is projected, Ayurveda can reach up to a large bulk of population. Private practitioners should emphasise on this point while interacting with patients. Various institutes of Ayurveda that have the capacity of creating large teams for mass work can help by arranging health promotion camps among cities and health awareness camps in remote areas.

There are many diseases where modern medicine can't find ways of management. They can be effectively cured or managed with Ayurveda. This specially includes lifestyle disorders which are causing a big headache to the healthcare system. This load can be minimised by our stream but it should be well focused and projected to general public.

9. Branding and Presentation

Last but not the least, presentation of pathy in public is very important. Not all but many people in this era with very fast lives, will waste time in judging you with your quality. They will recognise you by external appearance. This is where many people in Ayurveda fail. Due to this, we are still famous as 'churanchatnivala' among public. There are very less well established brands in Ayurveda they may be drugs or hospitals.

For mainstreaming of Ayurveda, it is important that it should be first of all 'considered' by general public. It should be made presentable so as to attract people from all levels. Healthcare professionals, attendants, dispensing rooms, hospitals should be well maintained. Brands of preparations should be

established that are known to everyone.

Palatability of medicines also comes under this aspect. Medicine is the lifeline of healthcare delivery. So it should be in a form that is attractive in looks, not with bad smell and taste though these things affect efficacy due to change of form. This delicate balance between efficacy and palatability must be maintained in order to popularise medicinal preparations.

10. Conclusion:

It is very unfortunate that we need to find ideas to bring a science like Ayurveda in mainstream. An eternal science like this is side lined due to inactiveness of many people related to it. They just keep on blaming others for their failure. There are still many hurdles other than those described here that should be crossed in order to succeed.

The science of Ayurveda was established in ancient times to serve the humanity. We all, Ayurvedic practitioners, students, teachers, philosophers, governing bodies, political leadership should go hand in hand to establish and return its glory back. Then only we can create a healthy society and help the mankind.

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