

# Ayurveda: Finding place in own house

Creating a body of knowledge on the concept of integrative medicine is a challenging and multi-disciplinary task that calls for new capacity building. Ayurveda scholars have to demonstrate the ability to participate in evolving the “integrativeness” of Ayurveda without compromising its core values and basic principles. The 'holistic' concept of Ayurveda must be maintained while undertaking systematic pharmacological and clinical investigations.<sup>[1]</sup> This task is indeed like riding a tiger, and many more programs need to be planned and successfully implemented to stand up to the expectations of global scientific peers.<sup>[2]</sup>

Several inspirational efforts are being made to promote Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine at national and international levels, and, in this editorial, we wish to highlight few exemplary efforts which offer lot of strength and solace to Ayurveda fraternity. We also regretfully point out an unfortunate incidence of denying reimbursement for Ayurveda treatment to a soldier by the Armed forces. Let me outline these representative stories.

## EXCELLENCE IN INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE RESEARCH AWARD

During the last few years, an increasing number of institutes are getting involved in trans-disciplinary and integrative research. However, due recognition of such research from scientific community in India is still suboptimal. The European Society for Integrative Medicine (ESIM), has established an international research prize in integrative medicine for the excellence in integrative medicine research. This award is in collaboration with Biologische Heilmittel Heel GmbH (Heel)—a pharmaceutical company that develops, manufactures, and distributes medicines based on natural substances. Heel is actively engaged in the field of scientific research in natural healthcare and fosters the concept of integrative medicine to improve patient care and health. The ESIM research prize is awarded in two categories, one for clinical investigations and another for basic research. Each winner is awarded the sum of 10000

Euros. Early this year, nominations were invited based on quality and innovations of scientific studies published in peer-reviewed journals during years 2011 and 2012. The jury consisted of eminent international scientists and experts in integrative medicine who carefully evaluated and rated these papers according to the following three criteria: innovation, level of relevance, and scientific excellence. The award will be formally announced at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of ESIM in Florence, Italy, in September 2012.

We hope that efforts on integrative and whole systems research on Ayurveda would get due attention and recognition.

## KERALA INITIATIVES FOR AYURVEDA

Kerala has shown the way for re-establishing Ayurveda in its pre-eminent place. The deep-rooted tradition of Ayurveda, the Ashtavaidya parampara, presence of various organizations like Arya Vaidya Sala, and consistent support from the government have ensured that Ayurveda remains at the forefront, and Kerala remains in the news for this. Recently, the Hon'ble Chief Minister Mr. Oommen Chandy announced a separate Ayurveda University for Kerala. The digitalization of over 12 000 palm leaf manuscripts in the Thunchan Manuscripts Repository, one of the country's biggest digital repositories, has also been initiated. The Government of Kerala initiative “Oushadhi” is the largest public sector producer of Ayurveda medicines and is instrumental in supplying Ayurvedic preparations to over 1 000 government hospitals and dispensaries at concessional rates. The State Drug Control Department is vigilant and known to act against those violating the Drug and Cosmetic Act, issuing notices against companies for misleading false claims and warning celebrities against advertising such products. These legal actions need to be viewed positively as they call for accountability to the claims made by the pharmaceutical industries. The latest initiative of the Government of Kerala is the “Sam Pitroda Global Ayurveda initiative. We know Sam Pitroda's role in revolutionizing telecommunication and technology sector and also as Chairman of National Knowledge Commission. He is presently Chairman of National Innovation Council and Advisor to the Government of India for Infrastructure, Information, and Innovation. With respect, passion, and long standing commitment to traditional knowledge, he together with

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DOI:

10.4103/0975-9476.100167

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Darshan Shankar, has established the Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT), now known as Institute of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine (I-AIM). It is heartening to know that the Government of Kerala has invited Mr. Pitroda, Chairman of I-AIM, to conceptualize and lead the 'Global Ayurveda initiative'. The Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment as a facilitating agency comprises of six high-level sub-committees for this ambitious initiative in chosen areas like software development for electronic documentation of Ayurveda practices for evidence on safety and efficacy, endorsement for integrative centers of clinical research for validation of clinical practices, quality control facilitation for classical product dossiers to facilitate its international acceptability, development of cheapest, scientifically validated microbe-free drinking water kit, establishment of significance of medicated water, mass education program on Ayurveda, and introduction of insurance cover for Ayurveda sector.

### DUE RECOGNITION TO AYURVEDA IN INDIA

The Indian Government has for the first time attempted to mainstream Ayurveda in healthcare by focusing the 12th five-year AYUSH plan on national health goals. However, much needs to be done for this bold move to be properly realized. We need to visualize a uniquely Indian model for the 21<sup>st</sup> century healthcare that demonstrate a paradigm shift from disease and treatment centric system to a new integrative system that gives equal importance to prevention and wellness along with curative care. AYUSH systems should be invited to contribute in a significant way to the design of integrative healthcare system in India. In fact, India can lead because of high competence both in western biomedicine and its own AYUSH systems should be invited to contribute in a significant way to the design of integrative healthcare system where India can lead because of high competence in both western biomedicine and its own AYUSH systems. The Planning Commission has taken the first step in this direction.

We now come to the flip side of the story represented by a campaign initiated by Rajiv Vasudevan of "AyurVAID"—a chain of NABH-accredited hospitals. He has dared to start a mass online campaign to protest the decision of the Indian armed forces against reimbursing treatment cost incurred by soldiers under Ayurveda and other Indian systems of

medicines. The Ayurveda sector has strongly supported this petition. The incident which initiated the filing of petition that demands the intervention of the Defence Minister and The Chief of the Staff of the Army, Navy and the Airforce to formulate clear guidelines for such expenses was the refusal of reimbursement to NSG Commando P V Manesh, Shourya Chakra, who was wounded in 26/11 attacks and had opted for Ayurvedic treatment. It is also important to note that a study conducted by Col Tommy Varghese Retd.<sup>[3]</sup> clearly indicates that at least about 35% of army personnel prefer treatments from alternative streams of medicine as compared to the mainstream allopathic medicine. It is pity that in its own country, Ayurveda has to fight for its due recognition and find a place in its own house.

All these recent developments happened at different places—first in Europe, second in Kerala, third at Planning Commission and in corridors of power in New Delhi, are connected and concerned with a common cause—need for due recognition to the contemporary relevance of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine. Let us hope that the Department of AYUSH as a sectoral arm of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Defence, and other Government authorities take serious cognizance and offer proactive support to all those who are working in the best interest of Ayurveda and for people of India.

The call for renaissance of Ayurveda really is not limited to India but indeed is in the interest of the global healthcare.<sup>[4]</sup>

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**How to cite this article:** Patwardhan B. Ayurveda: Finding place in own house. *J Ayurveda Integr Med* 2012;3:109-10.