

AYUSH: An year of consolidation

Press Information Bureau (GOI): Holistic Healing has almost become a mantra in today's world given the myriad of health problems that mankind is facing on account of modern stressed out lifestyles. It is being increasingly accepted by the global community, both by patients and medical practitioners that no single system can address all the health needs of modern day society. India as we know has a long and ancient tradition of holistic healing, be it Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani or Yoga. They are not merely symptomatic treatment systems but lay emphasis on the fact that the basic premise of good health is a healthy lifestyle. This makes them ideally placed to provide answers to the health care needs of modern society.

AYUSH has a fairly large infrastructure of about 7 lakh registered practitioners, 3000 hospitals, 21000 dispensaries and over 450 UG/PG teaching colleges with an admission capacity of nearly 30,000 students. In order to take the benefits arising out of these to the people, steps have been taken to mainstream AYUSH in the health care delivery set up of the country. The road map includes posting an AYUSH doctor in every PHC/CHC. Over 4000 doctors have been appointed on contract and AYUSH facilities have been created in 203 district hospitals, 1798 PHCs and 2350 CHCs.

National Campaigns ‐ A unique initiative

What were once the preferred systems of health care for the masses are increasingly getting confined to a small section of western educated urban elite. As part of the strategy to bring back these systems into the mainstream the unique initiative of launching National Campaigns on select AYUSH themes was taken, the themes were developed keeping in mind specific areas of strengths that the different systems of AYUSH have. The broad format of the National Campaigns envisages the launch of the campaigns by a 2 day workshop at the National level followed by workshops at the State level and then at the district and sub-district levels. Thus a cascading effect is envisioned to spread the outcomes of the National Workshops from the Centre upto the district and the panchayat levels. So far four such campaigns have been launched. The first in the series being on Ksharsutra, which is an Ayurvedic para surgical procedure for treatment of Ano-rectal disorders. The technique not only stands duly validated by ICMR, but is being practiced by modern doctors in countries like Japan for over 20 years now. The Second was Homoeopathy for mother and child care. As we all know the health care needs of children and especially pregnant and lactating mothers are very different from the population at large. Homoeopathy being safe, effective, palatable and free from side effects is ideally suited to meet this need. The third Campaign was “Ayurveda for Geriatric Care”. The fact that the global population today is becoming increasingly gray is well documented. The chronic inflammatory and degenerative conditions that the elderly suffer from need special care, but with a health infrastructure already creaking under the burden of a growing population, care of the elderly is not a priority. Given this backdrop, Ayurveda provides the ideal health option with its Rasayana therapy which is a dedicated branch of Ayurveda for the care of the elderly. This was one of the 8 branches of Ayurveda developed millennia ago, and today in 21st century we are looking to it for solutions. The fourth campaign was on Quality Assurance of AYUSH drugs.

Some of the interesting outcomes of the different campaigns:

1. During the Ksharasutra campaign it became increasingly evident that there was an ancient technique which was not only validated by ICMR but had many takers amongst allopathic practitioners, who wanted orientation courses on the technique.
2. A core group of homoeopaths and allopaths has been set up to list out the specific conditions, which can safely and effectively be treated by Homoeopathy.
3. Both the ASU&H Industries and the enforcement agencies should work closely for capacity building for transition from quality control mindset to quality assurance mindset which includes process validation and converting textual knowledge into process technology and documentation at every stage of the production cycle as per GMP requirements.
4. A module for training of both AYUSH and Allopathic doctors on Geriatrics has been prepared.

New Schemes

Several new schemes have been taken up by the department during the 11th Plan, ‘Development of AYUSH Industry Clusters’ at an outlay of Rs. 100 crores is based on the recognition that the cluster approach is participatory, cost effective and provides critical mass for customization of the enterprises on ‘collaborating while competing’ principle. So the first cluster in Thrissur at Kerala has been approved and others in Nasik, Pune and Amritsar are in the final stages of appraisal. Identification of reputed AYUSH knowledge institutions in Non Governmental/Private Sector and supporting them to upgrade their functions and facilities to centres of excellence is another novel scheme of the department. Eight such centres are already being supported under this scheme.

AYUSH drugs have the potential to tackle community health problems resulting from nutritional deficiencies, epidemics and vector-borne diseases recognizing this the department has initiated the Scheme of AYUSH intervention in Public Health. The scheme is aimed at supporting innovative proposals of Government and private organizations to promote AYUSH interventions for community health care and to encourage utilization of AYUSH practitioners in public health programmes.

Apart from the codified systems of Medicine of India substantial knowledge exists in the form of local health traditions in various parts of the country. The department has launched a new scheme of grant-in-aid to NGOs working with rural communities to revitalize these local health traditions. More than 15 projects have been sanctioned so far.

In an effort to introduce AYUSH practitioners to the latest trends in teaching and clinical practice and to upscale their skills in new and emerging fields like IT enabled learning. Re-orientation Training, Continuing Medical Education and Exposure programmes have been undertaken.

Work on creation of a Traditional Knowledge Digital Library was continued during the year. Transcription of 90,000, Ayurveda 110000, Unani and 12000 Siddha documents has so far been completed. Access agreements are in the final stages of being signed with patent offices like EPO and USPTO for search purposes to prevent bad patents from being granted.

The cabinet approved setting up a National Mission on Medicinal Plants at an outlay of Rs. 630 crores for the 11th plan period. This addresses the entire gamut of issues facing the raw material sector of AYUSH starting with the cultivation of over 80,000 hectares to setting up seed centres, nurseries, medicinal plants processing facilities, post harvest management, testing for quality, good collection and agricultural practices to providing marketing support.

Pharmacopoeial Standards

Pioneering work has been done in the field of laying down of pharmacopoeial standards for ASU&H drugs, through the involvement of laboratories of our own Department and that of CSIR. Standards for 540 Ayurvedic classical drugs have already been published. First volume of pharmacopoeial standards for 50 poly-herbal formulations has been released. Pharmacopoeial standards for 200 Unani drugs and 71 Siddha formulations have been published. 9th Volume of Homoeopathy Pharmacopoeia of 100 raw drugs has been published. PLIM which has been modernized and is being designated as a WHO Collaborative Centre, has developed HPTLC Finger Print Atlas of 80 Ayurvedic single Drugs.

Achievements on the International front

As part of the on going Indian effort to reach an understanding with ASEAN countries, on various sectors of trade and commerce, the Department of AYUSH hosted an Indo-ASEAN conclave on Traditional Medicine. Given the vitality of traditional medicine systems in both the Indian subcontinent and the rest of the South East Asia, it is only natural that we share each others strengths in the sector and establish a synergistic relationship for the growth and development of Traditional Medicine. As an outcome of this an MoU between India and ASEAN countries has been drafted and communicated to the ASEAN Secretariat. An MoU on Traditional Medicine was also signed with China.

Efforts have been made to partner with like minded institutions for furthering the cause of AYUSH systems, like deputation of Ayurveda Experts to US Medical Schools. There is a Proposal to start one year PG Diploma for medical doctors in Debrecen and other Universities in Europe. We have taken steps for setting up a Centre for Research in Indian Systems of Medicine(CRISM) with the National Centre for Natural Products Research (NCNPR) at the University of Mississippi, this is a collaborative project between the Department of AYUSH, IIM Jammu and NCNPR. A mirror centre has already been set up at IIM Jammu.

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