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BRIDGING AYURVEDA AND MODERN HEALTH SYSTEMS: HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON PREVENTION AND WELL-BEING

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Abstract

Ayurveda offers a multidimensional approach to health that closely aligns with modern public health objectives. With its roots deeply embedded in preventive care and wellness, Ayurveda addresses not only physical ailments but also mental and social health dimensions. This article critically explores Ayurveda's relevance in public health, particularly in the context of India and Nepal, where it continues to be a widely practiced healthcare system. Concepts such as Dinacharya, Ratricharya, Ritucharya, Aharavidhi, and Swastavritta underscore lifestyle and seasonal regimens that foster health resilience. This paper examines how Ayurvedic principles can contribute meaningfully to public health by promoting wellness, preventing illness, and managing chronic and lifestyle-related disorders and also discusses challenges in integrating Ayurveda into mainstream public health, and proposes strategic measures to enhance its global applicability. It reaffirms that the foundational objectives of public health and Ayurveda are remarkably similar—preventing disease, promoting longevity, and enhancing quality of life. With the rise of lifestyle disorders, Ayurveda's preventive strategies and holistic treatments offer an effective alternative to allopathy-centered health models.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Public Health, Longevity, Health Promotion

INTRODUCTION

Globally, there is a huge burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as

cardiovascular diseases, cancers, respiratory diseases, and diabetes. Around 59% of all-cause disability-adjusted life years (DALYs), a summary

measure to indicate the overall burden of disease and includes mortality as well as morbidity, are due to NCDs¹. The world is changing quickly in every way; extreme pollution, climate change, population growth, and other socioeconomic factors are putting the environment, nature, and living things under a lot of stress to survive. Humans are fighting against these odds for survival at this difficult time. A significant global concern that cannot be disregarded is preserving both human health and the integrity of the natural environment. The development of new molecules for difficult diseases, bridging the doctor-patient divide, and advanced medical devices alone may not be enough to accomplish the goal of public health; perhaps a more comprehensive approach encompassing numerous factors that could significantly impact and enhance human health is required.

In South Asian healthcare frameworks, especially in India and Nepal, traditional medical systems such as Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, and Homeopathy are practiced alongside allopathy. Ayurveda, being one of the oldest health sciences, emphasizes an individualized and preventive approach to healthcare. As chronic diseases and lifestyle disorders continue to strain public health systems globally, Ayurveda's focus on maintaining health through lifestyle regulation, diet, and mental harmony is gaining relevance.

In Ayurveda, the body constitutes Dosha (Humour), Dhatu (Tissues), and Mala (Faeces). If Dosha (Humour), Dhatu (Tissues), and Mala (Faeces) are imbalanced, then the individual gets sick. Many ideologies have been defined in Ayurveda, such as Tridosha, SaptaDhatu, Mal, Panchamahabhuta (Five elements), Guna (Quality), Rasa (Taste), Prakriti (Constitution), Agni (Gastric fire), Srotas (Channels), and its personalized approach to Nidan (Etiology), Chikitsa, Rasayan (Macrobiotics/

Life lengthening drugs), and Yoga. If these ideologies are followed thoroughly in routine life, individual can attain a healthy long life. With modern science, we can only achieve some relief from diseases, but with Ayurveda, we can also evade illness; if we get any disease, then we can get rid of it, Ayurveda has an essential role in Public Health.²

Modern public health aims to prevent disease, prolong life, and enhance quality of life through organized societal efforts.³ Ayurveda aligns with these goals, advocating for the maintenance of wellness in healthy individuals (Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshanam) and the treatment of diseases in the afflicted (Aturasya Vikara Prashamanam).⁴ In classical texts of Ayurveda, many regulations related to public health, such as infectious diseases, immunity, nutrition, etc., are described, but the article is limited to the concept of Public Health and Ayurveda in brief.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis is based on classical Ayurvedic texts, modern medical literature, peer-reviewed articles, and digital academic resources. A comparative review approach was adopted to correlate Ayurvedic principles with contemporary public health strategies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Ayurveda and the Public Health Paradigm

The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being.⁵ Ayurveda echoes this view, describing health as the balanced state of bodily elements—Dosha (bio-energies), Dhatu (tissues), and Mala (waste products)—along with the optimal function of Agni (digestive fire), clarity of Indriyas (senses), and harmony of Atma (soul) and Manas (mind).⁶

When comparing these definitions, it is

found that both outlines have a comparable meaning. Ayurveda portrays three diverse sorts of Doshas, specifically Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. Each of these Doshas is encouraged separated into five classes. In some cases, Vata, due to a few of its properties, is compared with the anxious framework, Pitta with the Gastrointestinal framework, and particularly with gastric chemicals & metabolites. Kapha is compared with other liquids such as mucus and synovial liquid. Ayurveda moreover portrays seven diverse sorts of dhatu, specifically Rasa, Rakta, Mamsa, Meda, Asthi, Majja, and Shukra. Each Dhatu begins from a past Dhatu. For illustration, Meda is created of Mamsa, Mamsa is created of Rakta, Rakta is created of Rasa, etc. The regions of Rasa, Rakta, Mamsa, Meda, Asthi, Majja, and Shukra are ruled by Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. In the future, the body proceeds to operate and offer assistance to perform lifestyle exercises. Malas are Squander items (by-products of our day-by-day exercises). Ayurveda is based on the Dosh-Dhatu-Mala concept. Doshas are body components that perform body capacities. The body comprises seven Dhatus, and Malas are the body's squandered items. If all of this works well, it turns the human body into great well-being. In case anything gets imbalanced in this chain of movement, at that point it comes about in affliction.

Public Health is defined as "the science and art of preventing diseases, prolonging life, and promoting health and efficiency through organized community effort." The definition underlines three significant features: (i) prevention of disease, (ii) prolongation of life, and (iii) promotion of health. Proponents of Ayurveda have also highlighted these features. The objective of public health is similarly described in Ayurveda's aim. Two aims are mainly focused on in Ayurveda: one is the fortification of the health of a healthy

individual, and the second is the elimination of disease. Therefore, Ayurveda underlines the protection of the health of a healthy individual, which means that if a person is healthy, their health is ensured.

Correlating Ayurveda's Principles with Modern Public Health Principles

The Ayurveda framework of Doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha), Dhatus (seven tissues: Rasa, Rakta, Mamsa, Meda, Asthi, Majja, Shukra), and Malas (waste products) emphasizes systemic balance for health, with imbalances leading to disease.⁷ This aligns with modern public health principles, particularly in preventive medicine, holistic health, and systems biology, as outlined below.

Holistic and Systems-Based Approach

Ayurveda: The Dosh-Dhatu-Mala concept views the body as interconnected, with Doshas governing functions (Vata: nervous system, Pitta: gastrointestinal, Kapha: fluids), Dhatus forming tissues sequentially, and Malas ensuring waste elimination.^{7,8} Imbalance disrupts this chain, causing illness.

Public Health: The biopsychosocial model in public health recognizes health as a product of physical, mental, and social factors, similar to Ayurveda's systemic approach. Programs addressing chronic diseases (e.g., diabetes) target diet and stress, akin to balancing Doshas.¹⁰

Preventive Health and Personalized Medicine

Ayurveda: Prakriti (individual constitution) guides tailored lifestyle and diet to balance Doshas, preventing disorders like inflammation (Pitta) or anxiety (Vata).⁸

Public Health: Personalized nutrition and precision medicine use genetic and lifestyle data to prevent disease, mirroring Ayurveda's Prakriti-based care.⁷ Public health campaigns

promote tailored dietary guidelines, aligning with Ayurveda principles.¹⁰

Nutrition and Metabolism

Ayurveda: Proper digestion (Agni) supports sequential Dhatu formation (e.g., Rasa to Rakta), while poor nutrition disrupts tissue health.⁷

Public Health: Nutritional epidemiology emphasizes balanced diets to support metabolic processes (e.g., iron for blood, akin to RaktaDhatu), with dietary guidelines promoting nutrient diversity, similar to Ayurveda's focus on nourishing Dhatus.^{9,10}

Waste Elimination and Environmental Health

Ayurveda: Efficient Mala elimination (feces, urine, sweat) prevents toxin buildup (Ama), which causes disease.⁷

Public Health: Environmental health promotes sanitation and clean water to support waste elimination, reducing toxic load, akin to Ayurveda's emphasis on clear Malas.¹⁰

Chronic Disease Prevention

Ayurveda: Balancing Doshas and strengthening Dhatus through yoga and Rasayana prevents ailments like inflammation or weak bones.⁸

Public Health: Chronic disease prevention targets inflammation (Pitta-like) and obesity (Kapha-like) through exercise and anti-inflammatory diets, resembling Ayurveda strategies¹⁰

Health Promotion and Lifestyle

Ayurveda: Daily (Dinacharya) and seasonal (Ritucharya) routines regulate Doshas, Dhatus, and Malas for long-term health.⁸

Public Health: Health promotion emphasizes lifestyle interventions like exercise and sleep hygiene, as seen in WHO's Global Action Plan for NCDs, aligning with Ayurveda's structured

routines.¹⁰

The Dosh-Dhatu-Mala framework parallels modern public health's focus on systemic balance, personalized prevention, nutrition, waste management, and lifestyle interventions.^{7,9,10} Integrating Ayurveda principles with public health strategies could enhance preventive care, particularly in personalized and community-based health promotion

Public health strategies in Ayurveda are embedded in daily routines (Dinacharya), seasonal adjustments (Ritucharya), dietary guidelines (AharaVidhi), and ethical conduct (Sadvriddha). These holistic routines prevent disease onset and promote long-term wellness, aligning with modern concepts of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention.¹¹

Ayurveda is intent on making a happy, healthy, and peaceful society. Especially the simple regimens described in ancient classical texts are of immense use in handling public health problems faced by the present world today. Swastavridha is personal hygiene; it consists of dinacharya (daily routine) and includes tooth brushing, mouthwash, tongue scraping, bathing, exercising, eating, sleeping, etc. Ritucharya is the regimen and diet to be followed in the different seasons of the year. Sadvriddha is an orbit of social behavior and conduct of the individual based on religious rituals and practices. Rasayana and vajeekarana use rejuvenating agents to prevent aging; they impart longevity, and immunity against disease, and improve mental faculties. Secondary prevention emphasizes early diagnosis and treatment, which can be achieved by various modalities of diagnosis such as Nadipariksha (examination of pulse), Darshana (inspection), sparshana (palpation), and prashna (interrogation), etc., and treatment modalities such Shaman

(alleviation) & sodhana (purification). Yoga is an atomistic science that embraces physical, moral, social, mental, and spiritual well-being. According to Ayurveda, diseases manifest due to imbalances (attributed to stress) in this healthy state of body and mind. Ayurveda treatment modalities are directed toward correcting this imbalance and enhancing digestion, and eliminating toxins from the body. It follows an integrated approach to the prevention and treatment of illness and tries to maintain or re-establish harmony between the mind, body, and forces of nature. In Ayurvedic literature, Vagabhata and Sharangadhar emphasized this. Progressive deterioration of bodily features decade-wise, thereby setting milestones of aging. Nowadays, we see no discipline maintained by people due to their job patterns or busy schedules. People are gaining better but unfitted to preserve health and self-satisfaction.

The only way to become gratified is that healthy Dincharya should be followed. Our stressful and busy daily routine is necessary to bring radical change in body, mind, and consciousness. Dincharya helps balance one's constitution (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha). It also determines and regularizes a person's biological clock, aids digestion, absorption, and assimilation, and generates self-esteem, discipline, peace, happiness, and longevity. Dincharya is the collective information of all the practices promoting health and preventing disease that the ancient sages followed. Ayurveda is concerned chiefly with longevity, whose notion is limited solely to long-lasting life, but it circumscribes all the conditions to live in health and vitality to carry out a healthy death, meaning the final natural experience of the cycle of life.

Ayurveda recommends many therapies for maintaining our mental, physical, and spiritual health. Ancient techniques, therapeutics

(Rasayana), Panchakarma, and Yoga are being accepted to accomplish the following goals of treatment –

1. Strengthen the immune system.
2. Efficient detoxification system.
3. Responsive inflammatory system.
4. Free radical scavenging or anti-oxidant
5. Optimal metabolic system.
6. Balanced regulatory system.
7. Enhanced regenerative system.
8. Harmonize the life force.

In this era of lifestyle disorders, Panchakarma and Rasayana therapy is the only hope for health care. Ayurveda can also contribute to modern-day health scenarios like:

- In preventing the diseases – Metabolic, genetic disorders, allergic, autoimmune diseases, Seasonal variations, Aging / Geriatric.
- Alternative therapy- Allergic disorders, autoimmune disorders, Rheumatoid arthritis & other collagen disorders, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, Skin disorders, Gastrointestinal disorders.
- Complementary area of cooperation – Cancer, DM, IHD, CVA, Iatrogenic disorders, Bronchial Asthma, Neuromuscular disorders, Psychosomatic diseases – Ulcerative colitis, IBS, Psychological disorders – Stress syndromes, Anxiety, neurosis, Sleep disturbances, Joint Disorders and many more.

Preventive and Curative Framework in Ayurveda

Ayurvedic medicine divides prevention into three levels:

1. Primary Prevention focuses on health

promotion through balanced routines, personalized nutrition, and lifestyle management.

2. Secondary Prevention emphasizes early diagnosis through classical examination techniques like NadiPariksha (pulse reading), Darshana (inspection), and Prashna (history taking).¹²
3. Tertiary Prevention involves rehabilitation and disease management through Shodhana (detoxification therapies), Shamana (palliative treatments), and Rasayana (rejuvenation therapies).¹³

The concept of “ayu” or age is not just the number of an individual’s life span, the word ‘Ayu’ has a tremendous and beautiful classification in Sukhayu, Dukhayu, Hitayu, Ahitayu.^{2,14} The principles and practices of Ayurveda justify and show similarities with the principles and practices of public health.

Relevance in the Global Context

Ayurveda is being increasingly recognized in developed countries for its potential to lower healthcare costs and manage non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Its offerings—ranging from lifestyle consultations to detox therapies (Panchakarma)—address gaps in conventional medicine, especially for chronic and iatrogenic conditions.¹⁵

Though Ayurveda has great potential in its approach and practice, is not able to carve a space for it in the global platform. If the scientific approach of Ayurveda practice is proven with supportive documentation and evidence-based data, it is possible to take Ayurveda to the global market as a potential public healthcare delivery system. Since the complementary medical system is enormously focusing on molecule-based medicines alone, gross aspects such as preventive, promotive, and social health have been ignored. Public

health today is gaining momentum all over, and is a good sign for traditional medical systems to get their place to fulfill the needs of the day.¹⁶

Challenges and Limitations¹⁷

Despite its strengths, several obstacles hinder the mainstream integration of Ayurveda into global health systems:

- Lack of clinical standardization and quality control of herbal preparations.
- Insufficient rigorous scientific validation through randomized controlled trials.
- Inadequate institutional infrastructure and lack of skilled practitioners.
- Public misconceptions regarding the speed and efficacy of Ayurveda treatments

Limited governmental policy support and inconsistent education systems in Ayurveda.

- Another important provocation is the lack of adequate practical exposure in clinical practice.
- Economical or financial hurdles – As the treatment would cost more expense following it on a mass basis could be challenging.
- Lack of social awareness -India and Nepal are a developing country where inculcating such values in low socio-economic strata can be difficult due to low wages therefore measures should be taken to build cost-effective treatment through Ayurveda.
- Several other factors might contribute to such issues & discrepancies, for example:
 - Lack of standardization and quality control of the herbal drugs used in clinical trials and use of different dosages of herbal medicines.

- Inadequate randomization in most studies, and patient batches not properly selected.
- Difficulty in establishing medicines as conventional medicines may not have palatable taste and aroma etc.
- Wide disparity in the duration of treatments using herbal medicines.
- Media creation of toxic effects of Traditional Medicines due to the use of minerals and metal.

This article reaffirms that the foundational objectives of public health and Ayurveda are remarkably similar—preventing disease, promoting longevity, and enhancing quality of life. With the rise of lifestyle disorders, Ayurveda's preventive strategies and holistic treatments offer an effective alternative to allopathy-centered health models.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda holds vast potential in enhancing public health frameworks through its preventive philosophy and integrative treatment methodologies. It emphasizes the interdependence of mind, body, and environment, offering sustainable solutions to modern health challenges. Ayurveda is concerned mostly with longevity, whose notion is not only limited merely to long-lasting life, but it encompasses all the conditions to live in health and vitality to achieve a healthy death, meaning the natural final experience of the cycle of life. Thus, in Ayurveda the concept of public health, even encompassing all ages, focuses primarily on the individual capability of healthy aging intended as completely fulfilling one's life. For Ayurveda to assume its rightful role in global healthcare, systemic reforms in education, research, and policy implementation are imperative.

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