

Letters to Editor

“Ayurpathy” – The pharmaceuticalization of Ayurveda

Sir,

This communication is with reference to the "Ayurpathy: A modern perspective of Ayurveda" by CK Katiyar, published recently in your journal under the section "Innovative Views."^[1]

It becomes necessary for me to register my response to the call for a new discipline "Ayurpathy" as the arguments in its favor seem to rest heavily on one of our studies. Unfortunately, the proposal is filled with confusion, ambiguities, vagueness, and a poor appreciation of the principles of Ayurveda. The proposal merits little attention and I argue below why this requires little or no further academic debate.

Our study does not support the dichotomy theory: While arguing that a dichotomy of views is emerging among the stakeholders of Ayurveda, the author extensively cites one of our studies to support his perception of dichotomy.^[2] From his communication, it appears as though our study has reported such a dichotomy; however, the fact is that our report has not documented any such dichotomy of views.

Our study recorded general views and opinions about the scientific validation of Ayurveda practices, the need for advanced methods of drug standardization, toxicity studies, clinical research, etc., and for these to be incorporated into Ayurveda education and research. The agreement toward this viewpoint was almost uniform and almost equally strong irrespective of the participant groups. As Singh RH^[3] in his response to the call for "Ayurpathy" correctly points out, the intention of our study was to document the perceptions of the students and the teachers of Ayurveda regarding the existing system of Ayurveda education.^[2] Had there been a real dichotomy as suggested, our study should have shown an equally strong disagreement toward this viewpoint. In another report derived from the same survey,^[4] we have gone on further to propose an integrative model rather than a divisive approach for Ayurveda education and research. Our study represents the perceptions within academic institutions^[2] and reflects the perceptions of neither the industry nor the consumers. How the author derives from our study the need for "Ayurpathy" for education, research, or industry is unclear.

Glaring confusion, ambiguities, and vagueness in "Ayurpathy": If "Ayurpathy" deserves to be promoted to the level of an "Academic Debate," then several basic objectives have to be clarified. For instance, where in the contemporary realm of Ayurveda is "Ayurpathy" proposed to be introduced and implemented: at a particular level of Ayurveda education, or as a distinct activity in "pharmaceutical production" and "marketing"? If it is intended to be introduced in education, at what level of education and what are the envisaged benefits and complications? For instance, if introduced at graduate level of education, there will be two streams of Ayurveda physicians, which is not a solution for any of the problems the author has highlighted. If "Ayurpathy" is to be introduced at postgraduate level, say, as a speciality of *Rasashastra*, it is unclear how these students will differ from Pharmaceutical Science students. Neither the conflicts that would arise from such a duality are alluded to, nor the point of a potential conflict of interest.

The author says: "Conventional Ayurveda may run parallel and continue to preach ancient theory of *Rasa*, *Guna*, *Virya*, *Vipaka*, and *Prabhava*." Who is the audience for this "sermon"? Is it students, consumers of Ayurveda-related healthcare services, or educationalists-policy makers? If it is students and educationalist-policy makers, then many of the questions listed above need answering. If it is the consumers, why would they need any preaching at all?

As an academician passionate about Ayurveda, and therefore curious and open minded about interventions and suggestions to enhance the current standing of Ayurveda education, research, and practice, I presume the author's intentions of "Ayurpathy" are merely aimed at the growing "Ayurveda-Pharmaceutical" industry: one stream of industry manufacturing classical Ayurveda formulations (Conventional Ayurveda) and the other based on manufacturing the derivatives of Ayurveda formulations (Ayurpathy). Ayurpathy-derived products will have to pass through the stringent quality control tests and will be aimed at specialized and possibly global markets which are still based largely on simplistic principles of contemporary Pharmaceutical Sciences. The author provides little clarity for even such issues.

A flawed perception Altogether: Brushing aside these and other ambiguities let us for a moment examine again the merits, if any, in discussing the suggestion for "Ayurpathy." Plant-, animal-, mineral-based "*Dravyas*" (The *Materia Medica* of Ayurveda), and Ayurvedic Pharmaceutical products represent only a small fraction of a wide spectrum of Ayurvedic interventions for maintaining health and curing ill health. For instance the entire sub-discipline of *Svasthavritta* that includes *Ritucharya*, *Ahara Vidhi*, and *Panchakarma* has immense preventive significance. Furthermore, Ayurveda provides sound theoretical constructs and patterns that have a potential to guide the current streams of sciences to gain further insights into the biology of health and diseases as evidenced in a recent study.^[5] Cutting these roots and divorcing Ayurveda from the basic principles with an aim at globalization of pharmaceutical products is a flawed perception and suggestion. It is very likely that the outcome of such an exercise may look no different from what is being faced by the much crippled pharmaceutical industry and its side effect ridden designer drugs.

Implications of "Ayurpathy": The need of the hour is to bridge the gaps – for instance, ones between Ayurveda and the current sciences – the divide caused by inadequate appreciation of the epistemological principles and inappropriate curriculum,^[6] and not to enable processes that catalyze further estrangement from the commonsense and wisdom of Ayurveda. Except one of promoting the "Ayurveda Pharmaceutical industry" to grow in directions that deviate grossly from the essence of Ayurveda, "Ayurpathy" as proposed will not be of any use to Ayurveda as a science or to the diverse healthcare needs of a country like ours.

The desire for "Ayurpathy" as a separate branch distinct from conventional Ayurveda is not only methodologically and ontologically reductionist, but also is alien to the epistemological basis of Ayurveda. Even if the intentions and implementation plans are spelled out clearly, "Ayurpathy" stands as a flawed and ambiguous suggestion that merits little or no further academic debate. "Ayurpathy" – the pharmaceuticalization of Ayurveda – supports little the cause of globalization of Ayurveda and stands to further damage Ayurveda in India and abroad.

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