

Integrative Approach for Health Care: Time to Review and Change the Paradigms

Sir,

I am an Oncologist. During my professional practice over the past 40 odd years, I had to often modify my approach to diseases and treatments. On returning to India from USA 40 years ago, with the modern training and tools in oncology, I was confident that I can control various types of cancer with my armament. Soon I realized that only pills, injections, and advanced radiation machines do not cure cancers. These tools may diminish the burden of visible cancer cells and tumors, temporarily! However, many a time's cancer keeps coming back. Cancer outcome varies from person to person in spite of standard text book prescribed treatments. Short-term animal experiments do not translate into long-term control of human cancer. Man has a mind and intellect. The body as well as mind together has to face the challenges and overcome illnesses. It is not enough only to destroy cancer cells; but, we also have to rehabilitate body and mind. This is true not only for cancer, but applies to the treatment of all illnesses. To understand the whole nature of illness, our focus should be on health rather than on laboratory tests. That is why; I soon developed interests in Ayurveda and other integrative methods of holistic medicines.

Although I am not a Cardiologist, I am a human with throbbing heart. I am eager to know about various ways to control heart diseases. Our organization, Swasti Niketan Health Foundation, has been spreading awareness on optimal methods of Health Care for Masses, especially for senior citizens. To show the proper way to the general public, such debates were advocated since ancient times by Ayurvedic Acharyas described in Charaka Samhita. As the aim of all the rivers is to reach the sea, the aim of all the health care workers should be to provide relief to diseased man. With open eyes and open mind, we have to look into different routes to health care. It is not vary scientific to look down on other methods without adequate study and clinical observations.

Heart disease is the number one health problem around the world. It is getting worse in spite of more pharmaceuticals,

more hospitals and more doctors! We are preoccupied with treating medical reports of a man rather than the whole man. We blindly accept the long-term damages many pills may be creating to suppress a microscopic isolated enzyme action to correct to the medical report. Billions are poured into such research to develop new drugs and molecules to fix up medical report findings in isolation oblivious to overall long-term impact of such modern therapies. It has been proved that chronic inflammations in any part of body increases risk of developing cancer. Doctors are expected to quickly fix a symptom, which may reflect nature's way of healing. Hasty prescriptions of antibiotics, anti-inflammatory and analgesic drugs prevent a chance for a natural cure of many acute conditions. We may be converting a curable acute disease in a chronic lifelong condition with a compromised quality of life. Unfortunately, this seems to be the trend of modern medicine.

A report from US Department of Health and Human Services in 2010 suggests that "medical harm contributes to about 180,000 hospital patients in US hospital per year. Many more patients are seriously hurt by prevalent model of hospital care." It has been proved that many times "Flawed research is used as a basis for medical guidelines."^[1] A well-known MNC Pharmaceutical company in USA recently had to pay \$3 billion dollars to settle a lawsuit for fraudulent research practices. An article in Clinical Oncology (2004-16, 549-560) by Dr. G Morgan shows only marginal 2.3 percent 5 years survival benefit in by cancer chemotherapy in Australian and American hospitals. This is at a tremendous physical, economic, and emotional cost to cancer patients. A recent article published in European Society of Cardiology Journal links 800,000 deaths in last 5 years in Europe due to improper use of beta blockers, a widely used heart medication! The article was immediately retracted by the journal on the grounds of insufficient peer review.^[2] There are many controversies about the real benefits of statins widely prescribed for preventing heart attacks. Cholesterol, contrary to public perception as an enemy, is an essential molecule constantly manufactured in our healthy liver to meet the demands of making new healthy cells and various hormones. There is nothing like bad or good cholesterol, which is the need for all living cells. It may not be even number one culprit in heart attacks as wrongly perceived by the general public and many medical professionals.

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Statin drugs block liver enzyme -3-hydroxy-3-methylglutaryl-coenzyme A reductase, which is responsible for production of cholesterol. However, this blockage of the enzyme action also interferes with many other essential functions of the same enzyme leading to hyperglycemia, muscular dysfunction and other problems related to multiple organs in the body! Statin drugs also increase risk to get diabetes.^[3]

Our current medical research model is “From Bench to Bedside” It should now change to “From Bedside to Bench”.^[4] The time has come to undertake Reverse Clinical Research Methodology. We should think of reversing the sequence of Phase I, II, and III clinical trials to Phase III, II, I clinical trials. Time tested, well-selected, safer natural products should now be subjected to research on efficacy, safety, consistency, and purity.

Current drug development is environmentally, economically, and ethically harmful. Many people assume that scientific integrity is somehow assured, and there are safeguards on the way to prevent any harm to patients. Economically driven obsession of industrial progress over past centuries has proved disastrous to the environment. Humanity is suffering from chronic physical, emotional and moral damage as a result of profit driven research in various field. Many new drugs, which were claimed to be safe, have been found to harmful in long-term. Many have to be withdrawn after many years due to harmful results.

Time has come to review and change the paradigms for optimal health care for the masses.^[5] Our current

model of modern medicine is proving unsustainable, unaffordable and unproductive for the common man. There should be much more emphasis on disease prevention with natural methods, nutrition and mental health. This is why; we should discuss all the integrative options to our health care. Integrative medicine does not exclude advances of modern medicine. There have been great strides on surgical front, which have made life comfortable in many situations. However, each patient may need a specific treatment model to achieve optimal health. I am sure medical debates and discourses in the future will be able to throw more light on this path.

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