

The Traditional Iranian Medicine Point of View on Health and Disease

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Abstract

Traditional Iranian Medicine (TIM) or Persian Medicine consists of the sum total of all the knowledge and practices used in diagnosis, prevention and elimination of diseases in Persia from ancient times to present. It is based entirely on practical experience and observations passed down from generation to generation.

Traditional medicine has the advantage of being considered as part of the culture therefore, bypassing cultural issues that may affect the practice of medicine. On the other hand, it can be used in conjunction with and as an aid to the conventional medicine. Development and promotion of traditional medicine could be considered as respect and honor to the culture and heritage of the people all around the world.

Keywords: *Traditional medicine, Persian medicine, Humors, Temperament, Iran*

Introduction

Since 30 yr ago, the World Health Organization (WHO) has considered the development of traditional medicine in order to implement the slogan "Health for all by the year 2000 A.D.". The decision was based on two foundations; first, lack of access of a great number of people (up to 80% in some counties) to primary health-care and second, dissatisfaction from the outcomes of treatments by modern medicine, especially in relation to chronic diseases and the side effects of chemical drugs (1).

In 2002 AD, WHO has described traditional medicine in more details as: "Traditional medicine is a comprehensive term used to refer both to TM systems such as traditional Chinese medicine, Indian Ayurveda and Arabic-Unani medicine, and to various forms of indigenous medicine. Traditional medicine therapies include medication therapies- if they involve use of herbal medicines, animal parts and/or minerals- and non-medication therapies if they are carried out primarily without the use of medication, as in the case of acupuncture, manual therapies and spiritual therapies (1, 2).

The Traditional Iranian Medicine (TIM) is a school that views the world as a good and seeking discipline created by the wise and omniscient Almighty (3, 4).

TIM consists of the sum total of all the knowledge and practices used in diagnosis, prevention and elimination in Persia from ancient times to present. It is based entirely on practical experience and observations passed down from generation to generation. TIM roots back to over 8000 yr B.C. and it is a branch if not the root of the so called Arabic-Unani medicine as quoted by Cyril Elgood, the English medical historian, was more advanced than that of Assyria and it is not too bold to go even further and claim that the Persians taught the Greeks the elements of that system of medicine, which has been known ever since as Greek medicine (5, 6). According to Ibn Khaldun, Among Persians, rational sciences had a high status. Such sciences had a vast scope since Persians' governments were majestic and long-lasting. Words have it that after Darius' murder by Alexander and the occupation of Kelikiyeh, and access to the countless Persian books and sciences, such sciences were passed to the Greeks (7).

Considering the definitions given by the WHO, the TIM can be divided into two sections: A- Written Traditional Medicine & B- Verbal Traditional Medicine (4).

The Structure of Tim at a Glance

The Traditional Iranian Medicine has two main branches, namely a theoretical branch and a practical branch which each also branch into sub-branches as follows:

1. The theoretical branch of TIM:

This branch is a science which discusses the status and changes of the human body and the causes and signs of health and disease.

2. The practical branch of TIM:

This branch is also a science, although it may remind us of practical procedures but it is really the science of how to keep health and how to bring it back after the occurrence of diseases.

The Seven Natural Affairs

In the TIM, physiological functions of the human body are considered to be based on seven factors, known as "Umoor-e-Tabee-e-ya". These are as follows

- I. Elements [Arkan]
- II. Temperament [Mizaj]
- III. Humors [Akhlat]
- IV. Organs [Azaa]
- V. Spirits [Arwah]
- VI. And VII. Faculties or Forces [Quwa] and Functions [Af'al] (8-12).

Prevention, Diagnosis and Treatment

TIM has given more attention and importance to the prevention of disease rather than its cure. Maintaining health was so important that the main duty of the physicians were to keep people healthy and to treat them if they became sick. There are six factors, which are essential for the maintenance of good health, which is referred to as: Setteh-e-Zarurieah. These essential factors are as follows:

1. Air
2. Food and Drink
3. Sleep and Wakefulness
4. Evacuation and Retention
5. Body movement and Repose
6. Mental movement and Repose

Modes and Strategies of Treatment in Tim

The imbalance in body temperament and humors leads to the onset of disease condition as it was previously mentioned. Therefore, treatment is based on the correction of temperament and humors to achieve a balanced state. Every humor has a specific temperament as described earlier. So, the drug used for the treatment should possess the opposite temperament than that of the diseased humor, resulting in normalization of the temperament. A disease, which is cold in nature, can be cured by a drug, which has hot temperament and so on. It should be noted that not all the diseases in the TIM are treated based on the temperaments, because there are three forms of disease according to TIM:

1. Distemperaments (distortion of the temperament of a single organ up to the whole body)
2. Disfigurements (distortion of the anatomy or the structure of an organ)
3. Disconnections (distortion of the correlation and connection between organs)

The Distemperaments are the ones mostly treated by correction of temperament and the two latter are mostly treated by special drugs or manipulation especially including surgery.

TIM physicians have mentioned four modes of treatment:

1. Correction of the six essentials (Tadbir ba Sitteh-e-Zarurieah)
2. Diet-o-therapy (Tadbir ba Ghaza)
3. Pharmacotherapy (Tadbir ba Dawa)
4. Manipulation or physical therapy (Aamale yadaavi)

These modes might also be considered as levels of treatment, where if a level fails or is inadequate the next level is considered.

Faculty of Traditional Medicine

Persian medicine is a part of the culture and history of Iran and Today the Islamic Republic of Iran is moving towards discovering its useful medical treasures to share with mankind all over the world and to take its role in the worldwide move towards integrative medicine. In this path the Tehran University of Medical Sci-

ences and Health Services has established the Iran's first traditional medicine faculty.

The Faculty of Traditional Medicine has officially started with its first students in 2007. Until now along with its own 6 PhD Degree Students, the faculty has also hosted 18 others from three other universities namely Shaheed Beheshti, Iran and Shahed Universities of Medical Sciences in order to teach traditional medicine with most unity and discipline by the help of the famous and specialist masters of the field from all over the country. These masters are basic or clinical science university professors or instructors from several universities or even traditional healers from the society.

The faculty of traditional medicine has seen theoretical and practical classes, library, computer site, conference halls and three clinics and is constructing traditional pharmacy and laboratory as well.

So far foreseen educational departments are as follows:

1. Traditional Medicine
2. Traditional Pharmacy
3. Medical History
4. Folk Medicine
5. Health

In this year of 2009, by the help of God; the Traditional Medicine and the Traditional Pharmacy departments are subsequently going to have their 3rd and 2nd PhD degree students.

The faculty of traditional medicine has also started projects on the edition and facilitation of old medical manuscripts by the use of IT and computer capabilities and has also started a project on seeking folk medical information beginning from The Province of Golestan.

Future Hopes for Tim

Traditional medicine has the advantage of being considered as part of the culture, therefore; bypassing cultural issues that may affect the practice of medicine. On the other hand, it can be used in conjunction with and as an aid to the conventional medicine. In accordance with the WHO's strategy, the old but useful remedies should be integrated in the conventional medi-

cine for the benefit of humanity as the Last testament, the Holy Quran, states: "The scum fades away and that which is for the good of mankind remains on the earth". (13).

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