

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY adapted to Ayurveda

It is a huge task to redefine research methodology guidelines adapted to Ayurveda, mainly because the ones known in modern times have been exclusively conceived for allopathy. In ancient times in which Ayurveda is rooted, the scientific approach of knowledge was deeply respected and practiced in the form of numerous discussions amongst the masters of the science and they are mentioned in the traditional literature. Even indications for research adapted to Ayurveda are mentioned, but they are slightly out-dated.

Given the modern scientific standards being the reference for the global scientific community, it is necessary to take at least some of their aspects in account while defining new criteria for research in Ayurveda in order to grantee a constructive dialogue for its practice abroad.

Please find hereunder few considerations related to research methodology adapted to Ayurveda:

While there exist different types of research methodology according to different fields of research (fundamental research, clinical research, overviews, etc.), needs for research in Ayurveda are not the same in India and abroad!

Research required in India

India does not need to prove the validity of Ayurveda to its people, to its authorities and to its own scientific community, because it is a recognized medical system here. The research required in India is without any doubt fundamental research, in order to refresh and upgrade the tremendous knowledge diluted through time and under the British rule. This research will consolidate fundamental knowledge and allow future generations of Indian Ayurveda teachers to be well trained in order to transmit Ayurveda on a high level not only to Indian but also to foreign students. This will assure Ayurveda to be practiced in its whole potential in India and abroad and allow Ayurveda to gain final recognition in India. Fundamental research will have to be done in the fields of Ayurvedic physiology, Ayurvedic pathology, pharmacology/Dravya Guna (fundamental and clinical), pharmaceuticals (including knowledge about the right land for cultivation, the right place and conditions for collection and storage of plants), etc.

The huge and well preserved but far not mastered traditional literature represents the cornerstone for successful fundamental research in India.

Research required abroad

Unlike in India and some other Asian countries, evidence for the validity of Ayurveda as a medical system has first to be proved on an international level. For this purpose clinical research and overviews are required.

Differences in the conceptual approach between Allopathy and Ayurveda

The Western analytical approach of the manifestation tends to divide and separate the whole in several parts and aspects in order to understand it. This has led to a huge degree of specializations within the medical system and the human being is not seen as one whole organism anymore but as the combination of many separate parts which are treated separately regardless of their physiological interrelations and inherent synergies. On the other hand the Western approach gives the observer's mind the central place instead of the "to be observed" manifestation. The observer will formulate a rational hypothesis which fits in his mind frame and then design a study according to his hypothesis and on that bases make conclusions concerning the reality.

The Ayurvedic approach differs from the Western one in that it looks at the manifestation as a whole, considering that in order to gain deep knowledge it is necessary to perceive the manifested in its holism

with all the inherent synergies even if they challenge the human mind and the known. At the same time the Ayurvedic approach will not focus on the observer but on what is to be observed, giving precedence over the mind to the manifestation, which the former is an integral part of, and which has to be integrated as a whole if knowledge has to be attained: the first step is to accept as reality whatever is observed, then gain experience through interaction with the observed, then integrate it as part of a holistic knowledge through logic reasoning and inference.

These preliminary considerations show the huge difference of approach between Allopathy and Ayurvedic medicine. They also explain why Ayurveda has evolved as a holistic system having an understanding of physiology enabling it to maintain and restore health with few side effects and will focus rather on health, while allopathy whose analytic understanding of physiology leads mainly to suppression of symptoms with many side effects, focuses on disease. This does nevertheless not lower in any way the great contributions of Allopathy in the fields of emergency medicine, diagnostic techniques and surgery where Ayurveda cannot compete. Thus both systems have to be considered as being complementary.

The following points will have to be considered while defining research methodologies adapted to Ayurveda:

1. For a same pathology the patients have to be selected according to the stage of chronicity. The latter is assessed in much greater detail in Ayurveda than in Allopathy, and will influence the outcome of the study
2. Outcomes of studies on chronic patients have to take in account improvement of quality of life in a huger extend than on acute patients. What healing is for an acute patient, can be improvement of quality of life for a chronic patient. Ayurveda traditional literature gives information about the results that can be expected according to the chronicity of a disease. The improvement of quality of life can be such, that the patient is not aware anymore of his disease, while the physician can still diagnose it. This hasn't got to do with removing symptoms, but with an overall improved state of health due to balanced metabolism and psychology
3. All research in Ayurveda should always be based on the Ayurvedic classification of disease and Ayurvedic diagnosis, treatment and prognosis. For facilitating the understanding for non Ayurvedists, each study should mention the specialization (e.g. dermatology, gastroenterology, etc) and the possible correlations with allopathic pathologies at the top of the study
4. Given the individualized approach of the patient in Ayurveda taking in account the individual
 - Physiological disorder underlying the disease
 - Constitution
 - State of immunity
 - Psychological strength
 - Environment
 - Lifestyle
 - Etc

Ayurveda adapted research methodology should create a frame in which these individual aspects are taken in account in order to increase the relevance of a clinical study or trial

5. Given the holistic approach of Ayurveda, treatments will not be limited to prescription of plants and formulations, but will in parallel integrate various manual treatments, deep purification procedures, elaborate dietetics, psychological support, life style changes, yoga and meditation. All this together will assure the therapeutic result and thus has to be assessed as a whole. Ayurveda adapted research methodology should create a frame in which this holistic therapeutic approach is taken into consideration for the sake of relevance of a clinical study or trial

6. Points 1-5 show that Ayurveda needs to create a very flexible tool for research methodology, which can be adapted to and framed for each study while taking in account individual differences and therapeutic holism in order to assure the relevance of clinical studies and trials

The development of guidelines for research methodology in Ayurveda taking in account the considerations mentioned under point 4 – 6 require a huge professional work driven by genius and creative people who have the necessary knowledge and motivation for this task. Otherwise Ayurveda will gradually lose its substance through its globalization process and humanity its last comprehensive medical system. A huge responsibility which has to be shared on a global level, since the stakes are global!

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