

Foreign lobbies behind shrinking Ayurveda to just wellness treatments - Dr Simone Hunziker

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Dr Simone Hunziker is the Director of SAMA-Swiss Ayurvedic Medical Academy in Switzerland. She has made phenomenal contributions for the propagation and acceptance of Ayurveda globally. In an exclusive interview with Mathrubhumi, Dr Hunziker was pin-pointing the role of foreign lobbies in downgrading the science of Ayurveda to just wellness treatments and massages.

What is the acceptance of Ayurveda internationally?

Ayurveda has immense potential for curing various diseases. But international lobbies contribute to the non-acceptance of Ayurveda as a medical science globally. They prefer to look at Ayurveda as a means to open up wellness treatment and massage centers hiding the fact that Ayurveda is a medical science.

How can we overcome the non-acceptance of Ayurveda as a medical science?

Actually many things can be done, but unfortunately the propagation of Ayurveda from Kerala and India is also as if it is meant for wellness treatment and massages. The very term "medical tourism" is promoting the latter two causes only. While these aspects are commercially fruitful they will limit the potential of Ayurveda as a medical science.

In this context, what can our Indian government do?

Of course, the government can do significantly and quite recently there are efforts in this direction. The department of AYUSH had conducted international seminars in 2009 and

2010 for bringing into light the essence of Ayurveda as a medical science. Nowadays there are more efficient activities of this sort.

What do you think are the main hurdles in bringing the traditional methods of disease treatments to the forefront?

Bringing traditional medical sciences into forefront requires very strong initiatives. China provides a good example in this regard. As early as 30 years back, they had started implementing measures to promote their traditional treatment method of acupuncture. The wide acceptance of acupuncture which we see today is the result of these efforts. Even acupuncture had to face some blows in between when the traditional values and discipline it carried were overshadowed by excessive marketing strategies. At the same time Indian government failed to take any measures to promote Ayurveda, one of the completest systems of traditional medicine in the world.

Being an allopathic doctor how were you attracted towards Ayurveda?

Even though I was interested and had studied in some depth about alternative medical sciences apart from allopathy, I was quite unaware of ayurveda until 2001, when I happened to meet Mr. Jean-Pierre Bigler who had a very good understanding of the science of Ayurveda. By then I had started a center for alternative medicine in a place called Lausanne in Switzerland. But after knowing about Ayurveda, the center was converted purely for the cause of it.

What are the potentials for Ayurveda being recognized as a foreign means of medical treatment in Switzerland?

A major revenue source for Switzerland comes from the pharma industry. Standards of Switzerland's medical treatments and medicines have wide acceptance not only in Europe but also world-wide. Ayurveda having no historical or scientific foundation in Switzerland, it was not accepted publicly until recently. Continuous efforts have widened the possibility of Ayurveda as an alternate medical system in Switzerland. The popularity

that Ayurveda gains in Switzerland is a mark of its potential for global acceptance. There have been several discussions with the Indian government related to promotional activities of Ayurveda recently.

What are the initiatives and efforts taken for the promotion of Ayurveda currently?

Collective efforts are needed to bring in more defined guidelines for Ayurveda as a medical science and also to formulate medicines and treatment methods suiting to the natural conditions of various places in the world. Keeping these in mind, initiatives are being taken in collaboration with the Nadiad Ayurveda College and Hospital, Gujarat and Arya Vaidya Pharmacy, Coimbatore. The formation of the website www.dharaonline.org which contains around 50,000 study reports and articles is a remarkable achievement. Enthusiastic activities are also being carried out by the Indo-Swiss Ayurveda Foundation.

What do you think are the main challenges in the promotion of Ayurveda?

In some parts of the world Ayurveda is understood as being linked with religion. However the understanding that Ayurveda is not a religion but a storehouse of traditional knowledge is essential. Today research related to various aspects of Ayurveda is being carried out in over 45 countries in the world. This is highly encouraging and if these studies are brought to the attention of many there is no doubt that Ayurveda can become a means for the healing of many diseases.