

Let Us Think About Traditional Medicine

P.S. MEHTA

THE main objective of National Health Programme is to provide Basic Health Care to the rural population in our country so that health facilities are available to all the people all the time and as near as possible to their home, within available resources. The health professionals must accept and adopt the safe, lowcost and popular technologies that have proved their worth in rural areas, and can be accepted by the people for Primary Health Care. Incorporating traditional systems of medicine in health services is one of the important aspect of it.

What is Traditional Medicine ?

The traditional medicine as defined by W.H.O. is the sum total of all the knowledge and practices, whether explicable or not, used in diagnosis, prevention and elimination of physical, mental or social imbalance and relying exclusively on practical experience and observation handed down from generation to generation whether verbally or in writing. It may also be considered as a solid amalgamation of dynamic medical know how and ancestral experience.

Many health professionals regard traditional medicine as a practice on decline and of no importance, which is a serious fallacy. In so far as culture itself, of which traditional medicine is an integral part, was neither static nor dead, cultural change and development takes place with the acquisition of new knowledge or with a change in the surroundings of the people who need to adapt in order to survive. In this context of cultural evaluation, traditional medicine has always developed and preserved its role of providing health care in communities.

Why Traditional Medicine ?

It needs to be incorporated in health care system with three main reasons :

Intrinsic quality : Traditional medicine is the system which is well-accepted by people and which is their own. It is a part of people's culture and, therefore, is effective in solving certain cultural health problems, which the imported system of health care cannot. Its incorporation will secure due respect for people's culture and heritage.

Holistic and unique approach : Traditional medicine views man in his totality with a wide ecological spectrum and emphasises that ill health is brought about by an imbalance of man and in his total ecological system, not only by the causative agent or pathogens. Ayur-

veda, the Indian system of medicine, considers positive health as blending of physical, mental, social, moral and spiritual welfare.

Manpower availability : There are about 5 lakh practitioners of traditional medicine in India, mainly based in rural areas. People also have faith in them so they can be utilized for the promotion of basic health services. Besides this the services of the traditional birth attendants spread all over can also be utilized for the purpose.

What Nursing Can Do ?

Nurses by their work promote an environment in which the values, customs and spiritual beliefs of the individual are respected. They can take leadership in incorporation of traditional medicine in health care by :

Integrating the principles and knowledge of traditional medicine in the nursing curricula.

Educating the communities to believe that traditional medicine is not a second rate system but is useful and part of their culture.

Participation in the team of researchers along with other workers and professionals.

Initiating dialogue with traditional practitioners and selecting simple, safe and efficient technology for integration in health care.

Recognizing and incorporating traditional practitioners in community development programmes.

Training of traditional healers with concepts of PHC and other Health Workers with concepts of traditional medicine.

The practice of Yoga and other systems, e.g., Ayurveda, Siddha, which are very popular in traditional medicine, may be adopted in the Health Care System, which are safer and provide longevity of life and can gain more faith of the community.

References

1. Ghoshal, B.C. *Health Care in Rural Areas*. New Delhi : D.G.H.S.
2. "Promotion and Development of Traditional Medicine". TRS 622. Geneva : WHO, 1978.
3. Report of a Study Group "Health For All, An Alternative Strategy". Pune : Indian Institute of Education, 1981.

**Celebrate Nurses' Day
with Enthusiasm !**

* The author is Nursing Tutor, L.H.V. Training Centre, Kota.