Chapter 156

Diversity of Culture: Its Influence on Health Care (Indian Scenario)

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INTRODUCTION

Unity in diversity is our strength in India. This is true in every walk of our life; health care being no exception. Diversity in religion, language, food, geographical conditions, culture, education, socioeconomic status and so on; an unending list explore our diversity. It has great influence in our lifestyle. Health care is no way different from other faucets when it comes to the question of diversity. In a country, so vast like us if we do not notice diversity then it is something abnormal. We have great legacy years before Christ was born. The culture has deep roots starting from arts to medicine; politics and science. There has been a regular alien impact periodically changing and modifying the existing norms. What we have inherited now has probably changed totally into new sphere altogether.

We may define culture as total way of living which includes beliefs in standards in socioeconomic status, language, religion, behavioral style and communication. The impact of culture in health care system directly affects the belief in causative factors and relief from illness. To plan and effect a set of congruent practice, policies in cross culture situation should be primary aim in health delivery system; like a consortium to look into the effect of cultural issues; to seek advice from diverse group heads, to employ unbiased staff and implement changes to improve services. Interpreters, local nongovernment organizations (NGOs) may be press into service. Myths, traditional healing methods may be discussed and placed for scientific analysis. This may help to absorb these methods to practical usefulness as evidence based traditional healing. This will also prevent unscientific and harmful practices of quackery. Guidance can be obtained from articles; for example, Putch in Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) (1985;254:3344-8); Sockalingam adapted from Hayes 1993—Cultural Competence and Terry: Cross Cultural Competency Continuum. Finally, it is because we are so different; each one of us is very important.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY/DEVIATION FROM TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS ON HEALTH: CURRENT INDIAN SCENARIO

India is a country with multiple linguistic populations with cultural and geographical diversification. Its people’s traditional way of life especially community living was outstanding and made its own mark in the ancient civilization. Their planning in civic, community issues and health care systems, concern for ecosystems and prevention for environmental population needs to be reviewed and suits the present day scenario. The choice of habitation, food habits, lifestyle; avocation; wide acquisition of knowledge in every field of science and humanity gave them the best of peaceful prosperity and healthy life. Their knowledge in various aspects of health like medicinal values of nature and alchemy, Sasthra Sikkithsa (surgery), Bala Sikkithsa (pediatrics), Sthri Sikkithsa (management of the diseases of women) Kshaya, Kushta, Megha, Madhumega were beyond comparison. The treatise of Susrutha, Siddhas, Thirumoedia Nayanan hold good even today. The Yoga Sastra, Pranayama, meditation have great impact even today as alternate system of medicine, extensively practiced in the west also. The deviations from the traditional practices are responsible for many of our present day health problems. The problems can be listed as follows:

- Selection place of habitation
- Personal habits (food, smoking, alcohol)
- Conjugal life and progeny
- Joint family system and community living
- Job and avocation
- Sanitation: Environmental poisoning—global warming.

Food habits deviation to western type of fast foods; access to processed food, polished cereals; adulterated pulses, chemical additives are preferred nowadays to organic food, vegetables, pulses and cereals. The net result is deficiency disorders; malnutrition; noncommunicable diseases like ischemic heart disease (IHD), stroke, arthritis, dementia are increasing in number.

Failure to protect the environment has increased the burden of oncolgical diseases; environmental toxicity related diseases like pneumoconiosis, asthma; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD); allergic disorders of skin; fluorosis, nuclear and endosulfan related health problem. Marriages were not permitted among the same gothrams in ancient days. Deviation has seen increase in number of inborn errors of metabolism; genetically-mutated diseases involving nervous system; psychiatric diseases, congenital malformations in the new born. Forgetting the principles of Yoga, Pranayama, meditation has resulted in the increase of stress-related health problems. Medical fraternity has commitment and responsibility to analyze in detail the good effects of our time old ancient traditions and reintroduce them blending with the newer armamentarium of health care for better health care.