

INTEGRATING YOGA AND MODERN MEDICINE : OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

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“Health for all by 2000 AD” has remained a pipedream. And can we achieve health for all even by 3000 AD? Unlikely. Unless we adopt an effective and integrative approach to the problem. The present health scenario is dismal. With increasing elderly population, the incidence of already prevalent chronic lifestyle disorders is on a steady rise. Antibiotic resistance is staring us in the face. Expensive high-tech modern medicine is beyond the reach of even the upper middle class. Public hospitals are over-crowded, under-staffed and fund-starved. Millions die of chronic diseases while they are on life-long drug treatment. It is clear that allopathy does not have all the answers and there is an urgent need to adopt an integrative and holistic approach to the problem. There are gems in “alternative” treatment modalities which are simple, bio-eco-friendly and inexpensive. We need to shed our ego and get rid of “holier-than-thou” attitude.

Yoga can effectively augment modern medicine. Being holistic, it is ideal for integrated development of our body, mind as well as soul. Mind, body and soul are intricately inter-related and mind-body dichotomy is at the root of our problems and disease. Health as well as ill health have physical, mental-emotional as well as spiritual dimensions. Elderly persons are more happy and healthy if spiritually active. However, spiritual domain has been outside the scope of modern medicine. Yoga can effectively fill this lacuna. Yoga has promotive and preventive potential and can play an important role before the disease manifests itself. Yoga has many advantages. Being non-pharmacological, it is free from negative, harmful side effects of drugs. In contrast, it has positive, “side benefits” in terms of improvement of psychosomatic health of the patient. Even if drugs have to be given along with yoga therapy, decrease in drug dosage will bring down the cost of medicare & limit the side effects of drugs. Another advantage of yoga therapy is that treatment of one disease is associated with simultaneous benefit in other diseases as well as improvement in quality of life. Yogic relaxation and breathing techniques can be of immense value in pre-operative relaxation and post-operative recovery. It is clear that inexpensive and holistic yoga therapy can be great boost to our health care delivery system.

Great ventures are bound to face great challenges. The principle of duality (dvand) is inherent in our world. Change is always resisted due to uncertainty, even fear of unknown. We have to deal with status quo-ists who lack motivation and love laziness. Who has time? Well meaning professionals are busy in administrative work or private practice. The curriculum is already loaded, how to add new content? Another challenge is to identify and exclude unscientific, untested and potentially harmful methods. Powerful drug companies have vested interest in tutoring and pleasing physicians. They are quite smart in modulating even the research findings! The task is stupendous, but worthy and achievable. We need to rope in competent, authentic and well meaning persons. We need visionaries who are scientists by training and action-oriented karmayogis. Use of internet will make the effort more effective, open and respectable. And Divine Grace will make the whole effort fruitful and enjoyable.

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