

Challenges and Opportunities to Healthcare Strategies in a New World Order After COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic has clearly shown lack of global readiness to address such an emergency with efficacy. The variability of decision making of how to tackle the problem, in different nations, has led to a wide disparity in the rates of morbidity and mortality. The conventional modalities of controlling the pandemic have often failed. As a consequence, the need to rethink about healthcare systems has emerged. Openness is perceived, for the first time, to explore traditional medicine to enhance innate immunity and to increase disease-resistance against viral-epidemics. The younger generation has a broader global and trans-cultural appreciation of health care. It is suggested that there is a need to grab the initiative to conduct integrative health-care research by state-of-the-art scientific methods. Such research would include valid experiential and observational data rather than merely emphasizing double-blind controlled trials.

Key Words: COVID-19, pandemic, Integrative health-care, traditional medicine, healthcare systems.

“More than anything, the pandemic had fully, finally torn back the curtain on the idea that so many of the folks in charge know what they’re doing. A lot of them aren’t even pretending to be in charge...Many adults lack the right answers, they are not even asking the right questions...The old ways of doing things doesn’t work. If the world is going to be better, it’s up to you. Ground yourselves in values that last, including honesty, responsibility and respect for others. It’s yours to seize the initiative. Meaningful change requires allies in common cause.” – Barack Obama, to the US High-school Students.

Healthcare systems and their operational efficacy are most stretched by the ongoing pandemic of COVID-19 globally. The most powerful and the richest nation of the world, the US, has the highest morbidity and mortality. Whereas, India has lower rates of

morbidity and mortality, despite its population density and a high infection rate in the population. The strengths and weaknesses of modern medicine have been overtly visible. The role of innate immunity and disease-resistance in Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine and Homeopathy are being seriously revisited. Several medicinal plants and natural products have been proposed for a fast-track R&D programme ^[1]. There are multiple efforts to develop a vaccine in India and abroad ^[2,3]. But most of these approaches are still “the old ways of doing things.” What is needed indeed is a renaissance in our rigid attitudes and strategies in healthcare. Such a renaissance is feasible, if and only if, the new generation grabs globally this opportunity to transform the current disease-systems of hospitalized ‘healthcare’ into dynamic and integrative health-systems for lifetime/lifestyle care. This is easily said. But how can one envisage the transformation?

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Can we go back to the individual qualities stressed by Obama? Firstly, let us focus on honesty. Are we honest about our commitment to health when we compare the percentage of the gross domestic product dedicated to health versus defense? How honest and consistent are we with our individual life style as to diet, exercise and *yoga/swasthavritta*? Do the drug industries stress on the needs of the masses while pricing their products? We must ceaselessly remember what Gandhiji said, "The world has enough for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed". Education of healthy lifestyle and for control of emotions should become the top priorities of the new world order. The second quality is responsibility. Do we consider health as much our responsibility as a right? The rampant non-use of masks, physical distance and sanitization has alerted us to the need of very early and intense training in personal and community hygiene. Several leaders have behaved irresponsibly with nonchalance and no chastisement!

The last two qualities stressed by Obama are: respect for others and seeking allies in common cause. One can extrapolate respect for others as respect for other systems of healthcare - Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Homeopathy, Unani, Siddha, Tibetan Medicine, Kampo (Japanese) Medicine, African Herbal Medicine etc. Each of these systems of healthcare has been in practice for so many years, before the advent of modern medicine. Several nations' populations have benefited by these systems. This reality cannot be forgotten. There is a need with an open mind to investigate the unique domains/modalities of each of these systems, through state-of-the art scientific methods. For example, *vardhamaan pippali yoga* of Ayurveda can enhance innate immunity against respiratory and influenza viruses^[4]. Similarly, several Chinese medicinal plants have shown anti-COVID-19 activity. But besides such specific activities, we have to seek out those concepts and preventive/therapeutic modalities which our modern medicine has not even imagined e.g. *Kaya-*

kalpa (Aging reversal)^[5]. Such integrative investigations will open up new direction for life and health sciences. A plea is made that new integrative research institutes be set up, with mandates to conduct research that would help inter-system strategies to emerge^[6]. Such strategies would combine the best data of the systems for human healthcare. Experiential and observational data too have that validity. Overemphasis on controlled double-blind trials has been quite often counter-productive. Sir Robert Platt said, "Most of the great triumphs of medical science have not required much statistical evaluation. For instance, one doesn't have to be a statistician to see the value of mitral valvulotomy in mitral stenosis, or of penicillin, insulin and so on." To adopt a transformative attitude to health wisdom of other nations, it is essential to drop the medical hubris that prevails in high-tech medicine and be willing to learn from others. May COVID-19 shakeup the medical community from its complacency and give us opportunities to learn and grow.

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