

## Role of Unani System of Medicine in Global Health Care: An Emerging Field

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### Abstract

Unani System of Medicine (USM) is basically originated from Greece and has been introduced in India by Arab and Persian settlers. USM has been accepted worldwide because of its easy availability, cheaper and relatively safer than other conventional medicine. World Health Organization (WHO) is the predominant agency that has direct impact on Global health care. USM has gained recognition from WHO in 1976. Global health is about understanding the causes and finding the means to provide solutions to the challenges and disparities in the health status of people worldwide. Ancient roots of USM are in China, Iraq, Iran, Egypt, Syria, India and other Far East countries. Nowadays USM is the best alternative choice of health care globally both in developed and developing countries. USM is an emerging field worldwide because it cures those diseases in which modern system fails like Bars (vatiligo), Dau sadaf (psoriasis), Iltehab-e-kabid (Infective Hepatitis), Hasat-ul-kulya wa masana (Renal and Bladder calculus) etc. The focus of this paper is to highlight the role of USM in global health care and more emphasis has been given to strengthen the USM worldwide.

**Keywords:** Global health; Herbal medicine; Traditional knowledge; Unani medicine

### Introduction

The Arabs in the middle of the 7th century discovered the ancient Greco-Roman learning and spread it to the new world. The Golden age of Islamic medicine began with the Persian physicians like Al-Razi (850-925), Ibn-Sena (980-1037). Ibn-Sena's Canon of Medicine (Al-Qanun fi'l-Tibb) was taught for centuries in the universities of Europe [1]. During the British period (1807-1946) western medicine in India gained momentum and Indian System of Medicine has faced many hindrances in their progress. Despite the pathetic attitude of the British Government, the progress of Unani medicine continued unabated [2]. The World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized the Unani System of Medicine as an alternative medicine to cater the health care needs of human population. USM is vibrant and vigorous today and is being researched, taught and practiced in 20 countries including Afghanistan, China, India, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Netherland, Norway, Poland, Korea, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, and Swizerland [3].

### Global acceptance of Unani medicine in present era

Global contribution by USM is unforgettable. In present era the demand for traditional Indian medicine has increased tremendously in India and abroad. Traditional medicine has maintained its popularity in number of Asian countries like China, India, Japan and Pakistan. In China Traditional medicines (Herbal preparations) accounts about 30 to 50% of total medical consumption [4]. Current Global market of Herbal and Ayurvedic medicine is estimated to be more than US\$ 100 billion, out of this E.U (European Union) accounts for about 40%, Japan 20%, USA 10%. The Asian countries together account for 30% of the global market [5]. Nowadays USM courses and practices have been

recognized by various countries like Bangladesh (Five year degree course recognized by University of Dhaka and other universities), Sri Lanka (five year degree course in Unani medicine at institute of indigenous medicine university of Colombo), Pakistan (Two universities are offering five year BEMS degree along with M. Phil and PhD) etc. Since its independence Sri Lanka holds a unique position in South Asia by providing free education and quality health care system. The health care system in Sri Lanka is enriched by the mix of Allopathic, Unani, Ayurvedic and other several system of medicine that exist together [6]. Traditional medicine in Saudi Arabia is based on herbal remedies and spiritual healing. There is hardly a city or village in the country where traditional medicines are not used or sold [7]. The first institution of Unani medicine was established in 1872 as oriental collage at Lahore in the undivided India. Thereafter many institutions came into existence. Presently alternative or traditional medicines practices in Pakistan are regulated by UAE (Unani, Ayurvedic and Homeopathic) Act of 1965. The Practitioners are to be registered by their respective councils [8].

### Global Demand of Herbal Medicine

Besides the research based activity medicinal plants are important source of income for the country. It is a global need to cultivate and conserve medicinal plants. In Russia 50000 tons of medicinal plants are used annually. Lucknow, a state in Indian, grows medicinal plants of 100 crore US dollars annually and the European Union uses 3000 kg of Glycerrhiza each year for which 400 tons plants roots are needed. By the year 2000 the total output of Chinese pharmaceutical companies was 28 billion US dollars and by the year of 2010 the share of Chinese traditional medicine in international market is improved to 15% from the existing 3% [8]. WHO reported in 2001 that in Malaysia, 500 million US dollars has been spent annually on traditional medicine as compared to 300 million US dollars on orthodox medicine. One third

of American adults have also used alternative medicine and nowadays CAM (Contemporary and Alternative Medicine) system is fast growing in the developed country (WHO, 2001) [9]. India is called "Botanical Garden of the World". India has accepted USM as one of the alternative health care system and has given it official status. It is the largest producer of medicinal herbs. Out of more than 25000 medicinal plants, only 10% are used for their medicinal value. Around 1800 species are systematically documented in the Indian System of Medicine (ISM). On the basis of current commercial consumption level in the ISM sector is of 5.9 lakh US dollars and the export level is of 7.2 lakh US dollars only on crude drugs, it has been estimated that commercialization of medicinal plant cultivation was 13 lakh US dollars for the year of 2001-2002 in India [5]. The forests of Himachal Pradesh supply 80 percent of all Ayurvedic drugs, 46% of all Unani drugs and 33% of all Allopathic drugs developed in India [10].

### Research at international level

Nowadays there is an overwhelming effort to integrate the alternative medicine with the allopathic system of medicine. Department of AYUSH, Govt. of India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the department of Pharmacognosy university of Mississippi's and established the National Centre for Natural Products Research, Where scientists are researching the efficacy of many Indian plants and herbs. More than 13000 plants have been investigated during past five years [11]. WHO's new strategies will help to validate the Traditional Medicine practice at international level. Global Unani Medicine and Research Foundation (GUMRF) are incorporated under the Law of United States of America. The Head Quarter of the foundation is at Chicago and has 5 regional offices in Asia, Europe, Middle East, Africa and Australia. The basic aim of the GUMRF is to provide platform to Unani scientists, Practitioners and well-wishers from all over the world to give financial support to Unani Medicine research and Health care programs in order to popularize the importance of Unani Medicine worldwide [12]. For the international co-operations 0.62 lakh US dollars were granted to the 11th five year plan (2007-2012) working group on AYUSH.

The key achievements were [13]:

In Malaysia one AYUSH cell has been established under this plan, Support has been provided to 38 experts for presentation of scientific papers in different international conference, Many AYUSH experts have been deputed in 95 international events, About 17 foreign delegations have been hosted to explore opportunities of international collaboration, 16 fellowships have been granted to foreign students for studying AYUSH system in India, 2 AYUSH books have been translated and published in foreign language, 12 conferences and research collaborations were supported through Indian Missions, Indo-US center for Research in ISM has been set up in the University of Mississippi, USA to undertake scientific validation and development of scientific information on ASU (Ayurvedic, Unani and Siddha) medicines through collaborative research and advocacy, 8 community herbal monographs prepared and submitted to EU, the fund 2.46 lakh US dollars were granted to 12th Five Year Plan (2012-2017) for international co-operation and collaboration of AYUSH research on Global health problems and needs.

### Policy planning by WHO

WHO defines the Traditional Medicine as "Sum total of knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experience

indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illnesses. More than 80% of the world population is using medicines made from Herbal and Natural products (WHO). The Director General of WHO (1966) has observed that the doctor shortage would be "one of the World's great challenges for years to come" [14]. Over the last few decades traditional medicine has gained worldwide acceptance. The WHO formulates the policies with appropriate regulations about alternate system of medicine and encourages member states of developing countries to support traditional medicine (WHO, 2001). WHO's goal "Health for all by 2000." has declared its official policy on traditional medicine as part of national policy. This goal can't be achieved without utilizing the traditional medicine (WHO,1978) [8]. WHO has launched the traditional medicine strategy 2014-2023 to mainstream the traditional medicine along with allopathic system of medicine because millions of people living in rural areas rely on it for their basic health care needs [15].

### Conclusion

There is no doubt that the Unani system of medicine has been accepted worldwide because it is affordable, easily accessible and free from severe side effects. It is a need of the hour to establish Herbal strategies in order to support the Greco-Arab medicine globally. I am in an opinion that the Unani system has an exceptional potential to become a Global Healthcare System and it has to be strengthened worldwide by the efforts of Government health policy makers and agencies to ensure its overall up gradation, standardization and improvement, in order to provide a promising medical health care system in the current challenging diseases.

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