

## Traditional Medicine: A Historical Appraisal

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**T**raditional medicine is the repertoire of cumulated medical experience of a given civilization. In a way, it resembles modern clinical trials, or rather trials stretched over many centuries without the required control group, appraised implicitly in the social memory.

Based mainly on trial and error principle, traditional medicine is a data source, the value of which cannot be ignored even in its crudest form. What characterizes the theoretical core of traditional medicine at any time or place is its ambiguous borders with metaphysical or superstitious tenets as steady companion because of inherent inadequacy of the system to explain otherwise obscure aspects of encountered problems.

Indigenous to the traditional medicines is the tendency of merging with neighboring cultures to constitute a more comprehensive entity. Guided by the collective human memory, individual healthcare experiences have developed alongside other aspects of human civilization. The cumulated knowledge about well-being and treatment of illnesses shape the traditional medicine of a given society. Therefore, there are as many traditional medicines as there are civilizations. The richness of traditional medicine is determined by the depth and length of any given population. That is why the Chinese, Indian and Iranian medicines are among the richest in the world. Based on a deeply rooted civilization and expansive cultural influence, Iranian traditional medicine has constituted the mainstream of human medical knowledge for a long period of time.

Modern medicine is the outcome of the confluence of many established trends from various societies. The development of this evolutionary social process has been enhanced by outstanding authorities who have endeavored to collect and compile their contemporary knowledge, thus allowing future generations to add their own share of novelties in promoting human knowledge and

indirectly upholding a beacon for other pioneers, and thus trying to avoid the re-invention of an already invented wheel.

Traditional medicine has particularly flourished where the existing political or commercial situation provided an opportunity to boost interactive intellectual capacity. There has been no interruption in the evolution of human medical knowledge throughout the history down to the contemporary era. The modern or conventional medicine is thus the continuation of a once traditionally practiced medicine somewhere in the world. In the present medical parlance, traditional medicine is usually considered as a type of alternative medicine insofar as it differs from the conventional one.

Noteworthy is the fact that, particularly in the developing countries, there is a strong tendency towards traditional medicine in healthcare delivery because of the low cost of the locally available skills and medicinal herbs. On the contrary, alternative medicine in developed countries is more recent and constitutes systems at variance to the prevailing and mainly Western science methodology.

Therefore in this context, "alternative medicine" is an all-inclusive term which also incorporates traditional medicines among others. The role of individual authorities and the learned elites involved classifying, updating and promoting the knowledge, besides initiating schools of thought or influential trends.

It is therefore concluded that we, guided by a meticulous scientific methodology, should re-examine the principles of time-tested traditional medicine, once originated in longterm experience of our ancestors, to widen our scope of prevailing medical knowledge.

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