

# Naturopathy and India's Health Care Challenges

*R M Nair*



*Naturopathy believes that all the diseases are caused by accumulation of morbid matters/toxins in the body due to one's faulty eating and living habits. It is based on the principle that nature itself is a doctor - make use of only natural elements to restore the health of a patient by eliminating toxins*

**H**EALTH INFRA-STRUCTURE is an important indicator to understand the health-care delivery provisions and mechanisms in a country<sup>2</sup>. Ensuring well coordinated, high quality healthcare also requires establishment of a supportive health system infrastructure.

### National Demographic and Health Profile

As per Census 2011, In India, out of a total population of 12101.9 lakhs (6237 lakhs males and 5864 lakhs females) the older population above 60 years is 7.4 per cent. This segment is the most vulnerable group requiring attention where naturopathy, which is easily accessible and affordable, can play a vital role. Further, the percentage of population below poverty line in the entire country in rural areas is 33.8 per cent and that in urban areas is 20.9 per cent. A total of 35.46 crore people are below poverty line<sup>1</sup>. This again is vulnerable segment requiring affordable healthcare.

The National Health Profile 2013 states that in the entire country there are 19,817 Hospitals, of which 15,398 are in rural area and 4,419 in urban area. In addition there are 1, 51,684 Sub Centers, 24,448 Primary Health Centers and 5,187 Community Health Centers in India. Further medical care facilities under

AYUSH by management status i.e. dispensaries and hospitals are 26,107 & 3,167 respectively<sup>2</sup>.

Further, as per information available, the following is the status of Naturopathy Hospitals/Dispensaries.

S.No	Facility	Naturopathy
1.	Hospitals	107
2.	Dispensaries	97
3.	Registered Practioners	1401
4.	Degree Colleges	17

Despite all the above infrastructure, there is still a wide gap in the ratio of population served per Doctor/Nurse/other paramedical available<sup>2</sup>. This is evident from the following figures:

### Naturopathy: The System

Nature Cure is a system of building the entire being in harmony with the constructive principle in Nature on the physical, mental, moral and spiritual planes of being<sup>9</sup>. Naturopathy, nature cure and Naturotherapy are the names given to the system of treatment in which seven elements are used to restore health of a patient.

Treatment by seven elements is quite different from the other systems

The author has 32 years of experience in Naturopathy and Yoga as a practicing Doctor as well as Administrator.

**Table : 2**

S. No	National Councils Registered	Population Served per Doctor/ Dental surgeon/ AYUSH/ Nurse/ Pharmacist
1.	Per Doctor both Allopathic and AYUSH	1217.84
2.	Allopathic doctor	1384.43
3.	AYUSH Doctor	1783.21
4.	Dental Surgeon	10120.85
5.	Nurse	531.79
6.	Pharmacist	1986.94

of medicine practiced at present. Those who regard nature cure only as a method of curing diseases are mistaken. In reality nature cure is the right way of living. It is an art of attaining a long, healthy and blissful life.

Naturopathy believes that all the diseases are caused by accumulation of morbid matters / toxins in the body due to one's faulty eating and living habits. It is based on the principle that nature itself is a doctor - make use of only natural elements to restore the health of a patient by eliminating toxins.

The father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi had repeatedly told during his life that to maintain good health one must live in harmony with nature and advocated nature cure in case someone fell sick. Gandhiji had advocated Nature Cure after his long experience and search in giving treatment through nature cure to those who came to him. The system of nature cure is so simple and easy that once a person takes refuge in this system he becomes its devotee throughout his life. In comparison to other systems of medicine Nature Cure is very cheap. Therefore, it can be very useful in our country. Our rural folk can easily adopt it and remain healthy without doctors and medicines<sup>4</sup>.

The main strength of naturopathy is in providing not only preventive, but also promotive and curative services. This system has been found very effective in the treatment of various chronic diseases especially among older people above the age of 60 years.

**What benefits will it cover?**

Naturopathy can tackle illnesses that cannot be wholly healed by allopathic treatment. The treatment focuses on the patient's entire body and not just a particular part. A naturopath instructs the patients about the significance of natural foods loaded with rich nutrition and to maintain a healthy lifestyle/ living.

Apart from natural food sources, Naturopaths offer several therapeutic modalities which have benefited millions of people across the globe.

**The main strength of naturopathy is in providing not only preventive, but also promotive and curative services. This system has been found very effective in the treatment of various chronic diseases especially among older people above the age of 60 years.**

Some important naturopathic therapies are:-

**Hydrotherapy-** Hydrotherapy is a well-known and ancient form of therapy. In hydrotherapy different temperatures of water, as in hot and cold baths, steam baths, compresses and fomentation, saunas, wraps, and immersion baths to produce several types of physiological effects depending upon temperature of water, duration and area of application for different disease conditions.

**Mud-Therapy-** Mud absorbs, dissolves and eliminates the toxins

and rejuvenates the body<sup>5</sup>. It is done with mud pack poultice and mud bath and is useful in curing skin conditions



such as (Eczema, Psoriasis, boils, pimples and patches) hypertension, diabetes, migraine, arthritis, constipation, gastritis, dyspepsia, anorexia, peptic & duodenal ulcers and menstrual disorders etc.

**Massage Therapy-** Massage is generally employed for tonic, stimulant and sedative effects<sup>5</sup>. The therapy is useful in improving blood circulation and relieving fatigue. It helps in opening up clogged pores of the skin which is essential for letting harmful toxins go from the body with sweat. The therapy is found very useful in all chronic conditions like rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, inter-vertebral disc prolapse, frozen shoulder, stroke, and in other gastrointestinal conditions like (constipation, dyspepsia, anorexia), CAD, metabolic disorders, hormonal disorders, neurological disorders etc.

**Chromo Therapy-** Sun rays have seven colors- violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. These colors are employed through irradiation on body or by administering charged water and oil for treatment<sup>5</sup>. The most commonly administered treatments in chromo therapy are plantain leaf sun bath, thermolium sun bath and open air sun bath. The therapy is useful for rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, psoriasis, eczema,

upper respiratory problems, anemia, paralysis, hypertension and digestive disorders.

**Magneto Therapy-** Magnets influence health. South and north poles of different powers and shapes are employed in treatment, by applying directly on different parts of the body or through charged up water or oil<sup>5</sup>.



In addition to the above modalities of treatments in Naturopathy, yoga, diet, fasting, acupressure, acupuncture, mudra therapy and pyramid therapy are also very popular. These therapies are effectual for treatment of nervous system imbalances such as stress, anxiety, muscle cramps, headaches, depression and fatigue. Reproductive disorders like menstrual problems, pre-menstrual syndrome, infertility, obesity, pre-conception care can be treated by this healing therapy. It is also recommended for digestive disorders, gastrointestinal disorders, constipation, prickly bowel syndrome. Immune disorders, allergies, sensitivities, weight loss, cough, cold and flu, insomnia, prostate problems, arthritis, high cholesterol can be cured by this therapy.

### Cost-effectiveness

A nation could save huge amount in health care costs and provide better quality of care without compromising patient outcomes if alternative medicine is widely practiced.<sup>6,7</sup> Naturopathic care is less expensive than conventional medicine, resolving the costly epidemic of chronic disease and making healthcare more available to those who otherwise could not afford it. The adoption and use of competent healthcare delivery system can be an effective way to manage health care cost and improve the quality of care.

## National Health Policy

The National Health Policy 2015, while acknowledging achievements in health emphasizes the need to be mindful and to confront the high degree of health inequity in health outcomes and access to healthcare services as evidenced by indicators disaggregated for vulnerable groups. These are urban rural inequities and there are inequities across States. A number of districts, many in tribal areas, perform poorly even in those states where overall averages are improving. Marginalized communities and poorer economic quintiles of the population continue to fare poorly<sup>3</sup>.

**nation could save huge amount in health care costs and provide better quality of care without compromising patient outcomes if alternative medicine is widely practiced.<sup>6,7</sup> Naturopathic care is less expensive than conventional medicine, resolving the costly epidemic of chronic disease and making healthcare more available to those who otherwise could not afford it. The adoption and use of competent healthcare delivery system can be an effective way to manage health care cost and improve the quality of care.**

National Health Policy also emphasizes the realization of the potential of AYUSH services for overall strengthening of AYUSH networks in the public sector with focus on AYUSH services, development of infrastructure facilities, capacity building and community based preventive and promotive interventions. The policy also recognizes the contribution of the large private sector and not for profit organizations providing AYUSH services.

## Conclusion

In view of the merits of naturopathy as an alternative system of medicine the Govt. of India through the aegis of NITI AYOOG may take up promoting this healing system in a big way so as to reach even the people living in remotest of remote places in an organized manner through the State Govts., Local Bodies, Panchayats, NGOs and other sectors. This may be on the lines of the vision enshrined in the National Health Policy cited above.

## Readings

1. Census data 2011, Govt. of India, Office of Registrar General and Census Commissioner India.
2. National Health Profile 2013, Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India.
3. National Health Policy 2015, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare
4. Science of Natural Life, Dr. Ganga Prasad Gaur and Dr. Rakesh Jindal
5. Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Homoeopathy, Yoga & Naturopathy systems of medicine in India, Department of Indian Systems of Medicine & Homoeopathy, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt. of India
6. Access Economics, National Institute of Complementary Medicine. Cost Effectiveness of Complementary Medicines. National Institute of Complementary Medicine. New South Wales, Australia: University of Western Sydney; August 2010.
7. CHP Group. Integrating Evidence-based and Cost-effective CAM into the Health Care System; 2010.
8. Ministry of AYUSH, 2010 Available at: [www.Indianmedicine.nic.in](http://www.Indianmedicine.nic.in)
9. Nature Cure: Philosophy & Practice Based on the Unity of Disease & Cure, Henry Lindlahr, M.D. □

(E-mail: [drmnair@bnchy.org](mailto:drmnair@bnchy.org))