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Review

Perception of health promotion in Unani herbal medicine

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 September 2011

Accepted 30 January 2012

Available online 21 March 2012

Keywords:

Unani medicine

Regimental therapy

Dieto-therapy

Health promotion

ABSTRACT

The Unani system of medicine is an age old, time tested system of Greek medicine dating back 2500 years. Like any other form of medical science, Unani medicine strives to find the best possible ways by which a person can lead a healthy life with minimum or zero sickness. Unani scholars believe that diseases can be kept at bay by the use of clean and fresh water, breathing clean air and consuming fresh food. Likewise, a balance should be maintained between the mind and the body so that the metabolic processes can operate easily and the body wastes evacuated. Unani medicine believes in promotion of health, prevention of diseases and cures through regimental and diet therapies.

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1. Introduction

The name *Unani* derived from a Greek word *Ionian*, means the knowledge of the states of the human body in health and ill-

ness (decline of health). *Unani* medicine refers to a tradition of Greco-Arabic medicine which is based on the teachings of Greek physician Buqrat (Hippocrates; 460–370 BC) and Roman physician Jalinoos (Galen) and developed into an elaborate

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doi:10.1016/j.hermed.2012.02.003

medical system by Arab and Persian physicians such as Al Razi (Rhazes), Ibn sina (Avicenna), Al Zahrawi and Ibn Nafis. It is a popular form of traditional medicine widely practised in South Asia and draws on the ancient traditional systems of medicine in China, Egypt, India, Iraq, Persia and Syria (Ahmad, 1983; Sina, 2007).

Health is a common theme in most cultures. In fact, all communities have their concept of health as part of their culture. Among definitions still used, probably the oldest is that good health is the absence of diseases. According to the World Health Organization, good health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. It can be construed as a feeling of wholeness and a happy frame of mind. It is not merely an issue of doctors, social services and hospitals but an issue of social justice and is not perceived in the same way by all members of a community including various professional groups (e.g., biomedical scientists, social scientists, health administrators, ecologists, etc.) giving rise to confusion about the concept of health. The holistic concept recognises the strength of social, economic, political and environmental influences on health. It implies that all sectors of society have an effect on health, in particular, agriculture, animal husbandry, food, industry, education, housing, public works, communications and other sectors. The emphasis is on the promotion and protection of health (Mahahan, 2009; Parik, 2010).

Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over and to improve their health. It is not directed against any particular disease but is intended to strengthen the host via a variety of approaches or interventions. The well known interventions in this area are health education, environmental modification, notional interventions, life style and behavioural changes. Unani medicine considers many factors in maintaining health and divides the body in a number of ways to define this wisdom. The first way that Unani medicine defines the body is to describe it in terms of the four humours. It further defines the state of the body into three different stages: health, disease and neutral. In the footsteps of both the *Quran and hadiths*, Unani Pathy sees illness as an opportunity to serve, clean, purify and balance the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual planes. Towards this goal, Unani therapies are natural which include appropriate fresh food in order to correct the imbalances, herbal medicines, drugs of animal and mineral origin, the promotion of codes of conduct conducive to positive health and appropriate rest for prevention and cure. It also emphasises compounds that belong to the human body and the avoidance of allergy-rendering foods. The balance between mind and body is also crucial in the metabolic processes and counselling is often offered towards this goal (Mahahan, 2009; Unani doctors, 2011).

The best possible ways of health promotion in this holistic system of medicine are improvement of *Tabiyat* (Medicatrix naturae or Immunity) by immunomodulators, restoration of balanced temperament, maintenance of balance in the quality and quantity of humours, moderation of *Asbaabe Sitta Zarooriya* (six essential factors for life) and adoption of *Ilaj Bil Tadabeer* (Regimental therapy), *Munzjij wa Mushil* (concoctive

and purgative) therapy and *Ilaj bil ghiza* (Dieto-therapy) (Kabeeruddin, 1999, 2009).

2. Improvement of *tabiyat* (immunomodulation)

According to the Unani discipline as it stands today, the human body is composed of seven natural and basic components called *Umoore Tabaiyah* which are responsible for the maintenance of good health. These are *Arkan* (Elements), *Mizaj* (Temperament), *Akhlaat* (Humours), *Aaza* (Organs), *Arwah* (Vital forces), *Quwa* (Faculties) and *Afaal* (Functions). For the proper functioning of the body, all the above mentioned components should be present and work in concert with each other. The loss of any one of these basic components or alteration in their physical state could lead to disease, or even death. It is highly essential to consider all these factors so as to reach the correct diagnosis and consequently the correct line of treatment (Sina, 1987).

Unani medicine describes the concept of *Tabiyat*, which is a supreme planner of the body to create a healthy environment within the body and prepare to fight against disease. If *Tabiyat* is strong, then a man does not suffer from a disease easily, if it weakens, a man becomes prone to disease. The *Tabiyat* may be defined as the sum total of structural, functional and psychological character of the human being. According to Hippocrates, there is a special ability hidden in every individual called the defensive mechanism of the body or in the language of Unani Pathy, *Tabiyate Muddabare Badan*. This *Tabiyat* is the best physician, and maintains the equilibrium of four body humours. Broadly speaking *Tabiyat* is considered as the real healer of the body and the role of the *Tabeeb* (physician) is to facilitate this *Tabiyat* (Rushid, 1987).

A well known Unani Scholar, *Rabban Tabri* in his treatise, *Firdousal Hikmat* has mentioned that, practically *Tabiyat* is regarded as an administrative power of the body. The function of administration of the body is accomplished by *Tabiyat* with the help of many powers called *Quwwa* of the body like *Quwwat tabaiyya* (Physical faculty), *Quwwate haiwania* (Vital faculty) and *Quwwate nafsania* (Nervous faculty). Thus the main role of the *Tabiyat* is to provide the general administration as well as defense or immunity to the body. Immunity is a part of this *Tabiyat*. Unani physicians recommended improving or strengthening the *Tabiyat* for restoration of health and the management of diseases. For this purpose they have mentioned various drugs under the headings of *muqawwe azae raisa* (tonic for vital organs), *muqawwe badan* (general body tonic), *muqawwe asab* (nervine tonic), *muqqawwe qalb* (cardiac tonic), *muqqawwe jigar* (liver tonic), etc. In contemporary systems of medicine, the concept of immunomodulators means the sources of the enhancement of the immunity (Tabri, 2003).

Unani medicine offers a number of drugs of plant, mineral and animal origin that have immunomodulation activity and efficacy to strengthen the immunity system, hence such drugs can be safely used in auto-immune diseases like ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, cancer, Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis, etc. Examples of such drugs are *Lehsun* (*Allium sativum*), *Kalonji* (*Nigella sativa*),

Filfil siyah (*Piper nigrum*), Chai (*Camellia sinensis*), Shahed (honey), Asalassoos (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), Haldi (*Curcuma longa*), Karela (*Momordica charantia*), Asgand (*Withania somnifera*), Neem (*Azadiracta indica*), Amla (*Emblica officinalis*), Piyaz (*Allium cepa*), Zanjabel (*Zingiber officinalis*), Ghikawar (*Aloe barbadensis*), Satawar (*Asparagus racemosus*), Badam (*Prunus amygdalus*), Marwarreed (*Margarata*), Zafran (*Crocus sativus*), Gaozban (*Borage officinalis*), Zaitoon (*Olea europea*), Qaranfal (*Eugenia corophyllata*), Zehar mohra (Serpentine), Murmakki (*Commiphora myrrh*), etc. (Sina, 1987; Spelman et al., 2006; Anonymous, 2004; Kirthikar, 1999).

3. Hippocratic theory of medicine

The first fundamental theory of the Unani system established by Greek philosopher Hippocrates (Father of Medicine, 460–370 BC) is founded in the belief that the body of the individual is composed of four basic elements collectively described as *Anasire Arba* (Four Elements). Nourishment of the body's vital fluids is achieved via *Akhlat Arba* (Four Humours). These fluids are in fact those which the human body obtains from food which include various hormones and enzymes. The concept of humours was originally postulated by Hippocrates who collectively referred to all the body secretions/fluids as *Akhlat* (humours) which depending upon their colour are named as *Dam* – Sanguineous humour (blood), *Balgham* – Serous humour (phlegm), *Safra* – Bilious humour (yellow bile) and *Sauda* – Atrabilios humour (black bile). According to *Abu Sahal Masahi*, humours are the body fluids preserved in vessels that are being prevented from flowing. He classified these humours into three types according to the site of their presence viz; *Ratoobate Urooqia* (Vascular fluid), *Ratoobate Ustaqsia* (Intracellular fluid), *Ratoobate Tajaweef* (Extra cellular fluid). These four fluids are responsible for maintaining the moisture of different organs of the body and also provide nutrition. These humours have their own temperaments as blood is hot and wet, phlegm is cold and wet, yellow bile is hot and dry and black bile is cold and dry. These are generated in the liver by the nutrient components of ingested food and liquids. Provided that these humours exist in normal balance, normal quantities and in the normal region of the body, the humour system will work in the normal way. Thus good health is regarded as a state of body in which there is equilibrium in the humours and functions of the body are normal in accordance to its own temperament and the external environment. This implies the holistic concept of health in Unani pathy. When the equilibrium of the humours is disturbed and functions of the body are abnormal, in accordance to its own temperament and environment, that state is known as disease (Sina, 2007; Hamdani, 2006).

4. *Asbaabe sitta zarooriya* (six essential factors for life)

Unani medicine has also given greater importance to the prevention of disease and promotion of health than cure. There is an influence of surroundings and ecological conditions on the health of human beings. There are six factors which are essential for the maintenance of good health called *Asbaabe*

Sitta Zarooriya. Unani medicine states that these factors should be balanced in terms of quality, quantity and sequence in order to sustain good health. These essential factors are as follows:

Hawae Muheet (Fresh Air): Good and clean air is most necessary for good health; many diseases occur due to changes in the air. Ibn Sina, a renowned Unani scholar in his famous treatise, Canon of medicine, says that the change of environment relieves the patients of many diseases. He has also emphasised the need of open airy houses with proper ventilation, play-grounds and gardens in cities so that everyone has plenty of fresh air and a proper ecological balance is maintained.

Makool Mashroob (Food and Drink): The food that we eat should be fresh, free from putrefaction and disease-producing matters. Drinking water should also be pure.

Harkat wa Sukoone Badania (Body Movement and Repose): To maintain perfect health and a good physique, the body requires exercise as well as rest. However, certain diseases can be cured by giving the body rest while some are cured by movement of affected organs. Inflammation and fractures require complete rest to get properly cured. On the other hand, afflictions such as paralysis demand specific quantum of movement. Several exercises help growth of muscles and ensure nutrition, increased blood supply and proper functioning of the excretory system. Exercise also keeps the heart and liver in good condition.

Harkat wa Sukoone Nafsania (Mental Movement and Repose): Psychological factors such as happiness, sorrow, fear, anger, etc. have considerable bearing on the health of a human being. Unani physicians believe that certain diseases like tuberculosis, hysteria and mental disorders are caused in most cases by emotional strain and maladjustment and therefore, while dealing with such cases, a physician should do his best to take all these factors into account. There is a branch of Unani medicine known as *Illaj Nafsania* (Psychological treatment) which deals with the above mentioned factors and many diseases are treated with psychological means. Sometimes this type of treatment cures the disease without using drugs and sometimes by administration of drugs together with psychological methods. The curative effect of music, agreeable company and beautiful scenery has also been recognised by Unani physicians.

Naum wa Yaqzah (Sleep and Wakefulness): Normal slumber and wakefulness are essential for health. Sleep is an ideal form of rest, physical as well as mental. Lack of sleep causes dissipation of energies, mental weakness and digestive disturbances.

Ehtibas wa Istafraagh (Retention and Evacuation): Waste products of body, if not completely and properly excreted, produce disease. The natural means of excretion are the diuresis, diaphoresis, vomiting, defecation, excretion through uterus in the form of menses, through eyes, ears and nose or respiration. Proper and normal functioning of the excretory processes must be ensured in order to maintain perfect health. Any disturbance in the normal excretory balances, whether it be excess, diminution or blockage, leads to disease. Practitioners of Unani medicine have, from time immemorial cured numerous diseases by regulating the excretory processes (Sina, 1987, 2007; Ahmad, 1983; Kantoori, 2009).

5. Ilaj bil tadabeer

In Unani medicine, this treatment methodology is based on four approaches viz, *Ilaj bil Tadabeer*, *Ilaj bil ghiza*, *Ilaj bil dawa* (Pharmacotherapy) and *Ilaj bil yad* (surgery). The adoption of regimental therapy is one of the best measures of health promotion in Unani medicine. It is one of the most popular methods of treatment, practiced by ancient Unani scholars since antiquity. Literally *Tadbeer* is an Arabic word meaning regimen or systemic plan whereas *Ilaj* means therapy or treatment. Thus, *Ilaj bil Tadbeer* means treatment through regimen, which is a method, through which care of the sick person and maintenance of general health is attained by the modulation or modification in *Asbaabe Sitta Zarooriya*. In this way, regimental therapies are mostly non medicinal procedures by which we modulate the life style, dietary habits and habitat of the patient and practise other therapeutic regimens for the treatment of various diseases. Ibn Sina has described 36 regimes including *Irsale Alaq* (Leeching), *Fasd* (Venesection), *Ishal* (Purgation), *Qai* (Emesis), *Idrar* (Diuresis), *Huqna* (Enema), *Hijamat* (Cupping), *Dalak* (Massage), *Riyazat* (Exercise), *Hammam* (Bathing), *Tareeq* (Diaphoresis), *Amla Kai* (Cauterization), *Nutool* (Irrigation), *Inkebaab* (Inhalation), *Tanafis* (Expectoration), *Takmeed* (Fomentation), *Imala* (Diversion of morbid material), *Ilam* (Counter Irritation), *Aabzan* (Hydration Therapy), *Zimaad wa tila* (Ointment and Liniment), etc. These regimes are actually meant for the *Istefragh* of *Akhlate radiya* (morbid fluids), from the body. As soon as these morbid humours are removed from the body, normal health is restored (Unani doctors, 2011; Kabeeruddin, 1999, 2009; Sina, 2007; Mahahan, 2009). Moreover, *Jamaluddin* in his book, *Aqsarai* and *Allama Qarshi* in his book *Mojaz alquanoon* says that *Ilaj bil Tadbeer* means the modification and moderation in factors for either prophylactic or therapeutic purposes. Blood-letting in the form of venesection, leech therapy and cupping with scarification is an essential part of regimental therapy. It has been utilised for preventive as well as therapeutic measures for thousands of years by ancient Unani physicians. The commonest therapeutic indications of this therapy as mentioned in Unani classics are *Jarabul Ajfaan* (blepharitis), *Dawali* (varicose vein), *Darde pindali* (painful calf muscle), *Malankhoonia* (mania), *Qooruhe khabisa* (septic wound, non-healing ulcer), *Warm* (inflammation) of organs, *Khanaazeer* (lymphadenitis), *Warme Tajaweful Anaf* (sinusitis), *Warme halq* (pharyngitis), *Bawaseer* (piles), *Nawaseer* (anal fistula), *Daaul feel* (elephantiasis), skin disorders like *Qooba* (ringworm), *Saafa* (tinea corporis), *Namash* (chloasma), *kalaf* (warts), *Narfarsi* (eczema), *Daul sadaf* (psoriasis), *Bars* (vitiligo), *Wajaul Mufasil* (osteoarthritis), hypertension, etc. (Sina, 1987, 2007; Kantoori, 2009; Baqir, 1989).

6. Munzij wa mushil (concoctive and purgative) therapy

This is the fundamental principle of treatment of all chronic diseases and is actually meant for *Istifragh* (evacuation or elimination) of morbid humours from the body. These morbid humours are the main culprits of diseases and aggravate the disease process if remain stagnant in the body. Therefore,

these abnormal humours are evacuated from the body by a method known as *Istifragh*. But prior to *Istifragh*, the process of *Nuzj* (concoction) is employed by the administration of *Munzijat* (concoctives) of the specific humour involved. *Nuzj* means that the morbid humour is made easily removable from the body by changing its consistency. Sometimes the matter is too thick or too thin to be eliminated, therefore some drugs are used which change the consistency of the humour and make it readily suitable for elimination, such drugs are known as *Munzijat* (concoctives). For each humour there is a specific concoctive and for every disease, specific concoctives are used for the evacuation of morbid matter causing that particular disease. For example, in case of *wajaul mufasil* (arthritis), *Sooranjan* (*Colchium luteum*) is used as concoctive and in case of diseases of nervous system *Ustokhudoos* (*Lavendula steochas*) is used as concoctive. Once the features of *Nuzj* are established in the respective humour, the actual method of *Istifragh* is followed through various modes like purgation, emesis, cupping, venesection, leeching, diuresis, diaphoresis, expectoration, enema, exercise, massage etc. The commonest mode of *Istifragh* employed for the excretion of phlegm is *Munzij wa Mushil* therapy (Sina, 1987; Kantoori, 2009).

7. Ilaj bil ghiza

Ilaj Bil Ghiza is the hallmark of treatment methodology in the Unani system of medicine. Unani physicians often suggest dieto-therapy as the first line of treatment or as an adjuvant therapy with other modalities of treatment. Unani scholars have been practising this therapy for prophylactic purposes for the maintenance of health as well for therapeutic purposes for the treatment of diseases since ancient times. Dieto-therapy is mainly emphasised for the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular, gastro-intestinal, hepato-biliary, renal, skin, sexual, endocrinal and nervous disorders. Before pharmaco-therapy, Unani physicians advised restrictions or alterations in the daily diet, formulated according to the disease with the advice to wait for few days because some diseases can be cured merely by diet. During the treatment, specific diets are advised according to the disease. Unani medicine is very popular for the prevention of diseases like gastric ulcer, hepatitis, ischaemic heart disease, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, sexual debility, renal stones, vitiligo, psoriasis and paralysis through its dieto-therapy (Sina, 1987, 2007; Kantoori, 2009).

8. Conclusion

It is evident from the above discussion that Unani medicine strives to find the best possible ways by which a person can lead a healthy life with minimum or zero sickness. It is totally based on the holistic approach to health and the major approaches of health promotion include improvement of immunity by immunomodulators, maintenance of balance in the quality and quantity of humours, moderation of six essential factors of life and adoption of regimental and dieto-therapies which are conducive to the maintenance and promotion of positive health as well as the prevention and cure of disease.

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