

Integrative Medicine Gaining Immense Popularity

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In the past few decades, we have seen rapid advances in medical technology and treatments, and these have saved and improved the lives of millions. Conventional medicine, also known as allopathic medicines, based on enormous body of research, however, has failed to adequately address the medical and psychiatric illnesses in our country and the world at large. Health parameters have not improved in parallel with advancement in medical sciences. There is an alarming data on health trend not just globally, but also in India and in Kerala.

Kerala is the diabetic capital of India, with the most number of newly diagnosed persons with diabetes. The average age for onset of diabetes is now 35 years. Kerala has the most number of people with high cholesterol.

Kerala has the second highest number of children who are either overweight or obese with related complications.

Premature deaths in adults, aged 30-40 years of age due to stroke or cardiac arrest are on the rise. There is increasing burden of rising incidence of Neuro-developmental and behavioural disorders (eg: Autism and ADHD). "Our healthcare system is in need of a change. Between the care we have and the care we could have lies not just a gap, but a wide chasm." The time has come where the paradigm of conventional medicine will be replaced by a blending of evidence-based holistic, complementary medicine with conventional medicine. It is through the integration of these modalities that we will better serve and support our patients and communities in their journey of health and healing. It is unfortunate that most of the patients and doctors think the only way to treat an illness is with drugs. In Kerala, the use of alternative medicine is inherent. Use of home remedies is a common first line of treatment and consulting the family homeopathic physician or 'Vaidyan' is a normal practice. However, it is not an easy task to differentiate which traditional system is effective for a given condition and it is usually left to the family's discretion.

Against this backdrop, self-medication has become the norm.

An integrative practitioner/team can advise on the safety or lack of safety, effectiveness with or without consultation from the alternative medicine practitioners.

Integrative medicine combines mainstream medical therapies and complementary and alternative therapies (CAM) for which there is some scientific evidence of safety and effectiveness.

The right attitude towards integrative medicine is, as Dr Weil one of the pioneers in Integrative medicine in University of Arizona says, “A physician practising Integrative medicine is not wedded to any particular dogma - Eastern or Western - but only to the ‘get-the-patient-better’ philosophy.”

Integrative medicine is intricately connected to preventive medicine. As the saying goes, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Over the past two decades, there has been a documented growth in the number of clinical centres providing Integrative medicine, the number of medical schools teaching integrative strategies, the number of researchers studying integrative interventions, and the number of patients seeking integrative care.

Integrative medicine is gradually becoming the new paradigm of practising medicine in India, especially in Kerala with centres established in hospitals like Amrita Institute of Medical sciences, Kochi, Holistic Medicine and Stress Research Unit at Government Medical College Thiruvananthapuram, and clinics like Hello doc, Kochi, Aditya Orthopaedic centre in Thrissur etc.

Integrative medicine (IM) is a healing-oriented medicine that takes into account the whole person (body, mind and spirit), including all aspects of lifestyle. It emphasises the therapeutic relationship between practitioner and patient, is informed by evidence, and makes use of all appropriate therapies.



Dr Maya Bose Vinod

Dr maya bose Vinod

MD Paediatrics, Integrative Medicine, Amrita Institute of Sciences, Kochi