

PHCOG MAG.: Invited Article Concepts of Unani Medicine

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Introduction

Unani is an Arabic spelling of Ionian, meaning Greek. It is also known as Greco-Arabic Medicine or Islamic Medicine. It originated in Greece and was founded by Hippocrates (Buqrat 460-377 BC). In Unani system of medicine the physiological functions of the human body is considered to be based up on the following seven factors, known as “*Umoor-e-Taba’ya*”. These are as follows-

- I. **Elements (*Arkan*)** There are four basic elements- Fire, Air, Water and Earth. These elements actually symbolize the four states of the matter. These four elements have their own temperaments. This system also emphasizes on four qualities - Hot, Dry, Cold and Moist. Each of the four elements express two of these qualities, fire is hot and dry, water is cold and moist, earth is cold and dry and air is Hot and moist.
- II. **Temperament (*Mizaj*)** The interaction of the elements produces a new state of admixture, which determines the temperament of an individual. Each individual has a unique temperament. A temperament may be (1) real equitable (2) equitable (3) inequitable.
In healthy condition, equitable temperament is present while in diseased condition, inequitable temperament prevails. Concept of the temperament has a great importance in diagnosis and deciding the line of treatment of a disease in a particular patient.
- III. **Humors (*Akhlat*)** are the secondary body fluids, synthesized in liver from the nutrient components of the ingested food and beverages. Hippocrate presented the concept of existence of four humors in the body viz., Blood (*Dam*), Phlegm (*Balgham*), Bile (*Safra*) and Black Bile (*Sauda*). There is a strong relationship between a body fluid and its associated humor so any imbalance in a humor will also cause changes in the composition and properties of its associated body fluid.
The dominance of each humor is recognized from its characteristic colour and qualities. The humors themselves are assigned temperaments, which are as follows-
Blood or Dam Hot and Moist → represent sauguinous temperament
Phlegm or Balgham Cold and Moist → represent phlegmatic temperament
Bile or Safra Hot and Dry → represent Choleric temperament
Black Bile or Sauda Cold and Dry → represent Melancholic temperament

IV. **Organs (*Azaa*)** The organs of the body are derived primarily from the humors, just as the humors are derived primarily from the ailments, are primarily composed of elements. The organs are of two types:

1. Simple organs (*Aza-e-Mufrida*) whose structure is homogenous throughout the body such as Bone, Cartilage, Nerve, Tendon, Ligament, Artery, Vein, Membrane and Flesh.
2. Compound organs (*Aza-e-Murakkaba*), are made up of different simple organs such as hand, which comprises flesh, bones, nerves, arteries, veins etc.

V. **Vital Forces (*Arwah*)** These are considered to be a life force and are therefore given importance in the diagnosis and treatment of the diseases. These are present in organs such as brain, liver, heart, ovaries and testicles.

VI. **Faculties (*Quwa*) and VII. Functions (*Af’al*):**

Faculty is a potential power. It should be differentiated from functions, which is actualized potentiality. But as each function depends on its own special faculty they can be treated together. There are three kinds of faculty and of which functions, which are as follows-

1. Vital faculty (*Quwwat-e-Haywaniyah*) -heart
2. Natural faculty (*Quwwat-e-Tabiyah*) - liver
3. Psychic faculty (*Quwwat-e-Nafsaniyah*) - brain

Vital faculty: It is the power received by the organs before they can acquire the capacity for the faculties of sensation and movement and for accomplishing the various functions of life. The vital force, which is closely related to the functions of the vital faculty, is a very refined form of energy and is thus able to penetrate into every tissue of the body. It is seated inside the heart.

Natural faculty: It is seated in the liver. When the vital force enters the liver, it is further mixed with the humors and forms a secondary, less refined form of thymos, the natural force. The natural force is distributed from the liver to the whole body through blood stream. The natural force is associated with cellular nutrition and growth and closely related to the functions of the natural faculty.

Psychic Faculty: It is seated in brain. It controls behavior and is responsible for voluntary movement and sensory and motor functions. It is also responsible for generation and coordination of thoughts, psyche, memory, intellect etc.

Approach of Unani system of medicine

Unani medicine has given greater importance to the prevention of the disease than cure. There is an influence of surroundings and ecological conditions on

health of human being. There are six factors, which are essential for the maintenance of good health, which are referred to as: *Asbab-e- Sittah-e-Zaruriah*. These essential factors are as follows:

I. Air: Fresh and clear air is necessary for health. Polluted air plays an important role in the development of several diseases. The respiratory diseases are most commonly associated with polluted air but other systems may also be affected. There are several factors, which make the air impure, e.g. smoke from industries and vehicles, humidity, dirty heaps of waste products etc. Atmosphere inside the houses should be clean. Every room should have proper ventilation and over crowding should be avoided. Sun light should reach there to prevent humidity.

II. Food and Drink: Primary source of nutrition for body is food and drink. Nobody can survive long without food and drink. Quality and quantity of food is an important factor for health. Fresh and balanced diet is essential for good health. Water, milk, tea and other beverages, must be pure. Principles of drinking are as follows-

1. Avoid drinking water during meals.
2. Drink plenty of water, especially in summer season.
3. Too cold or too hot water should be avoided.

In the same manner, principles for eating are as follows:

1. Food should be chewed properly before swallowing.
2. Meal should be eaten regularly on time.
3. Over eating should be avoided.
4. Improperly cooked food should not be used.
5. Some rest after lunch and walk after dinner is very useful.

III. Body movement and Repose: To maintain health, the body requires exercise as well as rest. Movement of the affected organs cures certain diseases while giving rest to the body cures some, e.g. several exercises are advised in paralysis. While inflammation and fractures require complete rest. Several exercises help in growth of muscles and ensure nutrition, increased blood supply and proper functioning of excretory system. Movements lead to excessive heat generation, rapid blood circulation and perspiration and repose decreases the metabolic activity. But rest is essential for the body as it helps in regaining/building-up the energy lost.

IV. Mental movement and Repose: A balance between mental movement and repose is necessary for good health. Excessive stimulation of the nerves is harmful for health. Nervous excitement like happiness, sorrow, anger etc. when not in balanced state can lead to several diseases.

V. Sleep and Wakefulness: Normal sleep and wakefulness are essential for health. Sleep is ideal for physical and mental health. Loss of energy is low during sleep because there is no voluntary movement. Lack of sleep causes mental weakness and digestive disturbances. But excessive sleep makes a person lethargic. Wakefulness causes burning away of the extra calories. Thus a balance between sleep and wakefulness is necessary to maintain health.

VI. Evacuation and Retention Metabolic process of body forms several waste products, which if not completely and properly excreted causes diseases. The natural ways of excretion includes urination, diaphoresis, defecation,

menstruation and respiration. Proper and normal functioning of the excretory processes must be ensured in order to maintain health. Retention of nutrients and evacuation of waste product plays an important role in maintaining the health. Any disturbance in retention and evacuation can lead to several diseases.

Principles of Treatment in Unani System of Medicine

As previously mentioned imbalance in body temperament and humors leads to onset of disease condition. Therefore, treatment is based on the correction of temperament and humors to achieve a balanced state. Every humor has a specific temperament as described earlier e.g. hot, wet, cold, and dry. So, the drug used for the treatment should possess an opposite temperament than that of diseased humor, resulting in normalization of temperament. A disease, which is cold in nature, can be cured by a drug, which has hot temperament.

Unani physicians have mentioned four methods of treatment Diet-o-therapy (*Ilaj-bil-Ghiza*), Pharmacotherapy (*Ilaj-bil-Dawa*), Regimenal therapy (*Ilaj-bil-Tadbeer*) and Surgery (*Ilaj-bil-Yad*).

I. Diet-o-therapy (*Ilaj-Bil-Ghiza*):

Unani system of medicine lays great stress on the fact that if treatment is possible by diet only then medicine should never be used. Disease can be cured by administration of specific diets or by regulating the quantity and quality of the food, for example, if there is burning sensation during urination, which is an indication that there is a de-arrangement in temperament towards the hotness. Then, diet having cold temperament should be used e.g. Kharpaza (*Cucumis melo* Linn.) and curd etc. In addition to nutritional properties several foods are capable of having pharmacological actions e.g. eggs are used as food for energy and externally applied for baldness.

II. Pharmacotherapy (*Ilaj-bil-Dawa*):

If the deviation in temperament is very much and diet-o-therapy alone is not sufficient then pharmacotherapy is advised in addition to the diet-o-therapy. According to Unani system of medicine, drugs having states opposite to those present in the diseases should be used. These drugs may be from plant, mineral or animal source.

III. Regimenal Therapy (*Ilaj-bil-Tadbeer*):

These are the specific measure for treatment other than administration of drugs and surgery. These include change in climate and environmental conditions, specific method of "Istifragh (excretion of the morbid material from the body through different routs, i.e. purgation (Ishal), enema (huqna) and special techniques as cupping (Ilaj bil Hijamat), venesection (Ilaj bil fasd) and leeching (Ilaj bil taleeq). These may be used as adjuvant to diet-o-therapy and pharmacotherapy. Some of the commonly used regimenal therapies are as follows-

1. Exercise (*Riyazat*) is voluntary movement, which an individual makes with one or more parts of the body to spend excess energy. It maintains health and prevents certain diseases. It is also advised to get relief from symptoms of various diseases e.g. cervical spondylitis.

2. Massage (*Dalak*) is a manual soft tissue manipulation and includes holding, causing movements, with or

without pressure to the body. Finger, palm and other objects like rough cloth may be used for this purpose. Any specific massage oil may be used for therapeutic purposes. Massage therapy improves functioning of circulatory, lymphatic, muscular, skeletal and nervous systems and may improve the rate at which the body recovers from injury or illness.

3. Fomentation (Takmeed) is a warm covering (diathermy) to a part of the body to relieve pain and inflammation. Diathermy should always be restricted to the level of tolerance. Hot fomentation treatments can be used in a variety of acute conditions such as muscle spasms, sprains, skeletal muscle pain etc.

4. Sweating (Tareeq) or Diaphoresis is a medical term for profuse sweating. It can be normal (physiological) - brought on by physical activity, emotional response or high environmental temperature or a symptom of an underlying disease (pathological). This mode is used for the purpose of Imala and Tanquia.

5. Diuresis (Idrar-e-Baul) is the production of an unusually large amount of urine. Diuresis is one of the important tools of evacuation of waste products from the body described in Unani system of medicine. There are many drugs which are used for this purpose e.g. Kharpaza (*Cucumis melo* Linn.), Kasni (*Cichorium intybus* Linn), Ghafis (*Gentiana dahurica* Fisch.) and Kasoos (*Cuscuta reflexa* Roxb).

6. Turkish Bath (Hammam) is a steam room where facilities are available for a bath followed by shower and massage. It improves general health and helps in treating various diseases.

7. Purgation (Ishaal) is a procedure to evacuate accumulated toxins from the intestines through the use of mild herbal laxatives. Various medicines are used for this purpose e.g. Turbud (*Operaculina terpeethum* Linn.), Ghariqoon (*Agaricus alba*), Saqmonia (*Convolvulus scammonia* Linn.), Aftimoon (*Cuscuta epithymum*) etc.

8. Diversion of Matter (Imala) Diversion of matter from one part of the body to another is an important method used in various diseases. This is specially used where hyperemia causes certain problems.

9. Enema Therapy (Huqna) is a method used for the removal of the superfluids from the intestines. Unlike conventional western enema, which includes plain water, Unani physicians use herbal infusions, medicated oils or other natural substances to cleanse the colon and large intestine.

10. Emesis (Qai) is the reflex act of ejecting the contents of stomach through the mouth. The main purpose of vomiting is to eliminate toxic substances from the stomach and upper part of small intestine.

IV. Surgery (Ilaj-bil-Yad)

Unani physicians adopt various methods of surgery, which can be used alone or in combination of other methods of treatment. These are as follows-

Venesection (Fasd) is a surgical process in which a blood vessel specially vein is cut open by a surgical knife

to shed excessive or impure humors. This is used for general evacuation. Excessive or abnormal humors are removed in the same proportion as present in the blood vessel. Unani system of medicine has indicated it in several diseases like meningitis, pneumonia, pleurisy, sciatica, gout, diphtheria, bleeding piles, etc.

Cupping (Hijamat) is widely discussed therapeutic regimen in the Unani medicine. It is a method used for local evacuation or diversion of morbid humors in which a horn is attached to the surface of the skin of the diseased part through negative pressure created by vacuum. The vacuum is created by the introduction of heat or suction. In the late period, a glass cup has replaced the horn and hence the procedure is known as cupping. It is used in various diseases like heaviness of head, asthma, dyspnoea, migraine, headache, haemorrhoids, amenorrhoea, sciatica, gout, arthritis etc.

Leech therapy (Taleeq) is a unique method of removal of bad matters (*Mawaad-e-Fasida*). Leeching is better than cupping in drawing the blood from deeper tissues. It is useful in the treatment of baldness, moles, freckles, filariasis, meningitis, pneumonia etc.

Cauterization (Kai) is an effective method for the treatment of several conditions e.g. destructive lesions, removal of putrefactive matter, stoppage of bleeding etc. Unani physicians have preferred cauterant (Mikwa) made of gold.

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NEWS

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