

## Ayurveda: The current issues and challenges

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### Abstract

Sri Lankan demographical data has shown decline of life expectancy in 1945 - 1947. The responsible factors include the social, economical, cultural changes, and changes in lifestyle. Strenuous efforts in expansion of health services, eradication programmes, education and improvement in food supply have increased the life expectancy in 1992 but the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) and Crude Birth Rate (CBR) has been declined. Infectious diseases including Tuberculosis (TB), Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) and Filariasis are major health issues in addition to noncommunicable diseases in Sri Lanka. Ayurvedic sector has a responsibility to contribute effectively in the national health promotion programmes. New dimension with appropriate direction in the training of professionals in Ayurveda and scientific research are essential to find better measurements for the current issues and challenges. It is not too late to open the ancient Sanskrit literature in old leaves to extract the essence for a better life.

Considerable efforts have been made world wide to upgrade the health status of the community and to provide highest health care facilities to enrich the lifestyle and satisfaction. Even though, the mankind had achieved the scientific and technical advances, issues concerning the health in developing countries remain unsolved.

Asian ancestors had had enjoyed 120 years of life expectancy, according to the legendry and folk lore, and they wished to increase it for more than 120 years. Ayurveda had been able to provide all services for the achievement of such a goal in both measures: preventive and curative. Ayurveda, which is not only a science of life but also a human centered knowledge about the universe, recommends the man for leading healthy life with utmost satisfaction. Time has changed many things. Most important things in the past had been buried in old texts. Lifespan has been shortening due to the violation of the rules of nature. *Pragnaparada*, the malpractice of knowledge, is the main causative factor for all kind of health hazards according to Ayurveda.

As per the Sri Lankan demographical data, the male and female life expectancy was 46.8 years and 44.7 years respectively in 1945 - 1947. The responsible factors for the decline in life expectancy include social, economical, cultural changes and changes in the lifestyle in addition to the impacts of world wars. Between 1947 and 1992 the figures have increased up to 71.1 for

males and 74.8 for females because of the expansion of health services; eradication programmes, education, food supply and improvement in economy. A substantial decline of Total Fertility Rate (TFR) from 5.0 in 1963 to 2.3 in the period 1988 - 1993 and 1.9 in the period 1995 - 2000 has been reported. The Crude Birth Rate (CBR) is also declining. The crude death rate has reduced from 22 (per 1000 population) in 1945 to 5.8 in 2002 due to the extensive health promotion activities conducted by the government.

Many epidemics have been controlled successfully with the invention of synthetic antimicrobial chemicals and immunization methods. Still the infectious diseases are main causes of hospitalization in Sri Lanka. Increase in viral diseases has been reported during the past decades. Viral diseases were the 5<sup>th</sup> leading cause of hospitalization in 2001 and it has become 3<sup>rd</sup> in the rank of leading causes of hospitalization in 2002. In all districts, gastrointestinal infections are a major cause of hospitalization. Apart from that, diseases of the respiratory system, urinary system, obstetric causes, and traumatic injuries have been reported as major causes of hospitalization in 2002. Significant increase in asthma, septicaemia and liver diseases related to alcoholism has also been reported. Tuberculosis (TB) has created major health issue in Sri Lanka. Higher number of TB cases has been reported in the age groups of 35-44 and 45-54. Rapid unplanned urbanization,

which is one of many causes of epidemic, has resulted in high epidemicity of Filariasis in health issue in Sri Lanka. Higher number of TB cases has been reported in the age groups of 35-44 and 45-54. Rapid unplanned urbanization, which is one of many causes of epidemic, has resulted in high epidemicity of Filariasis in Western, Southern and North Western provinces. Significant increase in Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) is also reported. Although Sri Lanka has low prevalence in HIV infection, in near future, it will be a great health issue.

Annual Health Bulletin<sup>1</sup> reported a dramatic increase in the number of cases hospitalized for diabetes mellitus in Sri Lanka and increase in hospital deaths due to the cardiovascular diseases. In most parts of the world non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are becoming major health hazard today. The rapid transition in life-style with the economic growth is one of many causes of non-communicable diseases. Decreased physical activity, changes in diets and dietary habits, increased tobacco and alcohol consumption, which are causes of hypertension, heart diseases and diabetes, are leading to premature deaths<sup>2,3</sup>. In 1989 NCDs contributed to nearly 60 per cent deaths and 43 per cent of disease burden globally. It is expected to increase to 73 per cent of deaths and 60 per cent health burdens by 2020<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately the inappropriate application of science and technical advancement has created health hazards that are preventable.

The objective of the health policy of Sri Lanka is to increase life expectancy and to improve the quality of life. The government has implemented a number of strategies to achieve the goal. Allopathic system of medicine has contributed greatly for the development national health development compared to the other systems of medicine such as Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy in Sri Lanka. The main functions of public health services include promotion of health and prevention of diseases (*Swastha parayana*). The governmental organizations and NGOs have already initiated a number of projects with the intention of controlling communicable diseases and improving the sanitation and nutrition.

Ayurveda provides its services in both public and private sectors. Contribution from Ayurvedic sector for the control and prevention of both communicable diseases and non-communicable diseases should be improved.

For the effective and efficient contribution in the national health development, health manpower training in Ayurveda is crucial. Professional Training Institutes in Ayurveda Sector have a responsibility to generate skilled professionals to achieve the forth coming challenges. A new dimension with appropriate direction is needed in the training of professionals in Ayurveda and it will turn into a new era of Modern Ayurveda.

A new trend has emerged in the scientific world for natural products. The global interest in natural products for healthy life has been intensified by modern scientific investigations. It is essential to consider the necessity of scientific research to find better measurements for the current issues and challenges and also in the future. It is not too late to open the ancient Sanskrit literature in Ola leaves to extract the essence for a better life and more satisfaction.

#### References

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