

Unani Medicine: Introduction and Present Status in India

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Abstract

Unani Medicine (commonly referred to as Greco-Arab medicine or Unani Tibb) is a traditional system of medicine practiced in Indian subcontinent. The present paper is an attempt to summarily introduce this complimentary therapy, its basic principles to western healthcare professionals. The overview of education, training and research in this field has also been presented.

INTRODUCTION

The Unani system of medicine; sometimes referred to as Greco-Arab medicine or Unani Tibb; is based on Greek philosophy. As per this traditional system, the human body is composed of four basic elements: earth, air, water and fire having cold, hot, wet and dry temperaments respectively. The body fluids are composed of four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. These humors have their own temperament:

Blood: hot & wet

Phlegm: cold & hot

Yellow bile: hot & dry

Black bile: cold & dry

The quality and quantity of four humors affect the state of health and disease in the body.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF UNANI SYSTEM OF MEDICINE

The Unani system of medicine originated in Greece (Unan or Yunan in Arabic language).

Aesculapius is credited as originator of this system. Buqrat (better known as Hippocrates, 460-377 BC) is said to be a descendent of Aesculapius and recognised as 'father of Unani medicine'.

Unani medicine developed in the four time periods each in a different geographical belt:

1. Greek period
2. Arab-Persian period
3. Spanish period
4. Indian period

CONCEPT OF HEALTH

According to Unani medicine, health is considered as a state of body with humors in equilibrium and body functions normal. Health is based on six essential elements:

1. Air
2. Drinks and food
3. Sleep and wakefulness
4. Excretion and retention
5. Physical activity and retention
6. Mental activity and rest

This theory is indirectly having partial similarity with the accepted definition of health as a state of physical, mental and social wellness.

DIAGNOSIS

Classical diagnosis in Unani system is based on examination of pulse, stool and urine in addition to routine physical checkup.

MODES OF TREATMENT

There are three modes of treatment in Unani system:

1. Regimental therapy (Ilajbil tadbeer) – Use of exercise, climate change, massage, venesection, leaching, cupping, diet therapy etc.
2. Pharmacotherapy (Ilajbil dava) – use of drugs of

plant, animal and mineral origin, either alone or in combination.

3. Surgery (Ilajbil Yad) – Surgical intervention in treatment as last resort.

UNANI MEDICINE: THE INDIAN SCENARIO

This section is intended to provide a brief over-view of the education & training, professional practice and research in Unani medicine including the recent advances.

EDUCATION

The Unani Medicine education in India is governed by Central Council of Indian Medicine (Govt. of India). Forty three colleges impart five and a half years' Bachelor of Unani Medicine and Surgery (BUMS) degree after 12 years of schooling. The BUMS courses are either affiliated to universities or are run by deemed university. The students learn basic / pre-clinical (e.g. anatomy, physiology), pre-clinical (e.g. pharmacology, pathology, hygiene) and clinical subjects (e.g. Unani medicine, surgery). BUMS course essentially involves a one year rotatory internship. BUMS can be followed by specialised courses in the form of house job training or post graduation.

3 year post graduate courses – MD (Unani medicine) or MS (Unani surgery) are offered by a number of institutions (Table 1) apart from National Institute of Unani Medicine, Bangalore in one or more of the following branches:

1. Unani internal medicine (Moalejat)
2. Principles of Unani medicine (Kulliyat)
3. Gynaecology, Obstetrics and Paediatrics (Amraz-e-niswan-wa-qabalat-o-atfal)
4. Preventive & Social Medicine (Tahaffuzi-wa-samaji Tibb)
5. Unani surgery (Jarahiyat)
6. Pharmacology (Ilmul Advia)

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Clinical practice is undertaken by Unani graduates after registration with a duly constituted government registration board / council. They work in government and private establishments as Unani medical officers, research officers, clinical registrars, teaching staff members, manufacturing chemists and as Unani drug inspectors with drug control

authorities. Few of the graduates and post graduates serve in the funded-research projects as research fellows or research associates. A sizeable number opts to work as Unani general practitioners. A minority of the Unani postgraduates are able to get the coveted Lectureships in the teaching institutions. These academicians have the opportunities to become Readers (Associate Professors) and Professors in the academic hierarchy.

RESEARCH

The academic research is mostly undertaken by Post-Graduates-in-training under the supervision of Unani academicians; sometimes; in collaboration with experts from other fields such as pharmacy, modern medicine and science. Dept. of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) under the Central Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is involved in the extra-mural research project funding to academic departments in Unani Institutes. The in-house research is undertaken by Central Research Council for Unani Medicine, New Delhi through its country-wide network of clinical, survey of medicinal plants and drug standardization units. Pharmacopoeial Laboratory of Indian Medicine, Ghaziabad under Central government is also involved in standardization of traditional remedies. Some Unani manufacturing companies also have their in-house research departments.

Ibne Sina Institute of Tibb in South Africa is also benefiting from the expertise of Unani physicians and academicians of India.

A paper has been published discussing the impact of Unani medicine on the Western world in Middle ages. Traditional knowledge digital library (TKDL) project under the functional control of National Institute of Science Communication & Information Resources (Council for Scientific & Industrial Research, New Delhi) is a milestone in the history of Unani medicine in India.

Clinical trials, standardization of drugs and manufacturing practices alongwith TKDL project are all aimed at getting global edge for this therapeutic system – the Unani medicine.

Figure 1

Table 1: Post Graduate Institutions of Unani Medicine*.

Institution	Affiliating University
AIMIJ Unani Medical College, Mumbai	Bombay University, Mumbai
Ajmal Khan Tibbia College, Aligarh	Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh
Ayurvedic & Unani Tibbia College, Karol Bagh, New Delhi	University of Delhi, Delhi
Faculty of Unani Medicine, Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi	Jamia Hamdard (Hamdard University), New Delhi
Govt. Nizamia Tibbia College	NTR University of Health Sciences, Hyderabad
Govt. Unani Medical College, Chennai	University of Madras, Chennai
National Institute of Unani Medicine, Bangalore	RG University of Health Sciences, Bangalore

*Indicative List in alphabetical order

FURTHER READING

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