

Education in Unani Medicine (Tibb) - Opportunities and Challenges

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“Life is sustained by heat and grows by moisture; heat is supported by moisture and feeds on it.” Ibn Sīnā

Introduction

Modern medicine, after dazzling the world for 200 years, is suffering with a crisis of confidence. This crisis is particularly widespread in the UK, Europe and USA. Some of the reasons for this are:

1. Dehumanization and commoditisation of patients and healthcare professionals.
2. Modern medicine is expensive, sapping the financial resources of nations.
3. Its participation in helping to sustain the epidemic of chronic lifestyle diseases.
4. The phenomenal and unacceptable increase in iatrogenic diseases.
5. Re-emergence of life threatening infections due to abuse of antibiotics.

Because of this, the public are seeking alternative healthcare solutions worldwide. Consequently, the last few decades have seen a resurgence of various forms of natural medicine and healing. Some of these are long established traditions such as Ayurveda, Unani medicine (Tibb), and traditional Chinese medicine, which go back thousands of years. Others, such as osteopathy and reflexology, are relatively new.

These diverse forms of natural medicine and healing are lumped together by dominant establishments under the label of 'complementary and alternative medicine', or CAM. The dominant medical establishment including pharmaceutical complex continues to attack CAM, claiming:

1. It is unscientific
2. It is ineffective
3. It is unsafe and dangerous
4. Practitioners of CAM are 'quacks' and charlatans
5. CAM practices are money making schemes and scams

However, the growth of CAM and of wisdom-based traditions of healthcare and medicine continues, particularly noticeable within industrial and post-industrial societies of Europe and USA. This paper will explore key opportunities and challenges posed by these developments specifically with regards to education in Unani medicine (Tibb).

Research in Unani Medicine - Discordance with Systems Epistemology and Principles

Despite considerable effort within the last 70 years, research in Unani medicine has not gained much recognition in the contemporary world. The reasons are many, however, the quantity and quality of the safety and efficacy data on Unani medicine is far from sufficient to meet the criteria needed to support its use worldwide, in particular in Europe, UK and USA.

[1]

The lack of research data is due to inappropriate healthcare policies, as well as inadequate research methodologies for understanding and evaluating Unani medicine. Ongoing research in Unani medicine is focussing more on modern medicine than on the Unani tradition itself and its strengths.

Predominantly, research in preventative medicine has been confined to cross-section studies in line with modern medicine protocol, without taking into consideration the contrasting epistemology and principles of the Unani Tibb tradition which has reservoirs of knowledge and expertise in disease prevention and health promotion.

Research done on Unani medicine in the last seven decades has followed the reductionist model based on Newtonian physics. This is unethical as it is based mostly on animal experimentation. It is unsuitable because it is based on old Newtonian physics which sees the universe and nature as being dead and inert, and without meaning and purpose. It also sees human beings as mere machines, or at best, sophisticated apes.

In contrast, the clarity within Tibb tradition regards the genesis, nature and purpose of a human being and provides a vision that is above time and space. It recognises the transcendental aspect of human beings and acknowledges the spiritual nature of each person, which can enable and galvanise individuals towards transformation and unification, an essential need of the 21st Century. [2]

Methodology for Research in Unani Medicine for 21st Century

Modern medicine has developed from logic of modern science which follows the deductive approach, whereas Unani medicine is known for its wholistic approach. In the last fifty years of research, there have been many emerging approaches for evaluation and validation of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) and wisdom-based traditions such as Unani medicine. These include: whole systems research (WSR); retrospective treatment outcome survey (RTO); comparison of prognosis and outcome study (CPO), just to name a few.[3]

Education in Unani Medicine - Discordance with Systems Epistemology and Canons (Laws)

As already mentioned in the section on research, the epistemology and principles of Unani medicine need to be reflected in the education and teaching of the tradition as well. Unfortunately the education of Unani medicine has not delivered the outcomes, as described in the following:

"In 2006, the Planning Commission convened a Task Force for AYUSH education, which found that the curriculum and course content across systems was unsatisfactory. The Task Force concluded further that most AYUSH educational institutions do not provide quality medical education, a feature compounded by poor infrastructure and lack of qualified and committed faculty. This yielded ill trained AYUSH practitioners who lacked knowledge of the fundamentals of the concerned systems of medicine, and were unable to practice in accordance with the best of their systems. Specifically, both under-graduate and post-graduate courses were described as "blindly imitative of the corresponding courses in Allopathic medicine... to the extent that the very character of the AYUSH systems gets comprised." [4]

Education According to the Epistemology and Principles of Unani Medicine - Ways Forward

"Contemporary western men and women, in quest of the sacred and the rediscovery of pontifical man, seek techniques of meditation which overcome the excessive cerebral activity which characterises modern mental activity, allowing the agitated mind to simply be. The quest may include yoga, oriental forms of medicine, natural food and medicine and the like. In reality the quest is for the heart which, in the spiritual person, who is aware of his vocation as man, "penetrates" into both the head and the body, integrating them into the centre, bestowing a contemplative perfume to mental activity and intellectual and spiritual presence to the body, which is reflected in its gestures and motion." [5]

"The wholistic and integrative perspective of Tibb can enable synthesis and development of the individual in the context of the family and the community. The emphasis of oneness and unity enable connectedness and not disintegration, which is often the hallmark of drug and surgery-based methods. The consequence of a wholistic perspective is development and inter-connectedness. In the 21st Century the theme of interconnectedness and interdependence will be of psychological and practical significance. Tibb, while able to deal successfully with physiological imbalances, is however most useful in psychological disorders." [6]

In the 21st Century, people are looking for wholeness, balance, wholistic cosmology, a feeling of connectedness with each other and with nature. They are also seeking out safe, effective and economical supplements and medicaments that can help them to get better when they're ill without resorting to costly and risky drugs and operations. With the ageing population in UK, USA and Europe, the healthcare costs are becoming unsustainable. The accelerating cost of modern healthcare is beyond the budgets of even prosperous industrialised nations.

The rediscovery of traditional wisdom-based healthcare such as Unani Tibb can meet many of these challenges if we can present authentic traditional medicaments and education according to the needs of our time and situations. College of Medicine and Healing Arts (The Olive Tree Project) is a case study and example of how we are attempting to provide some of the answers and solutions.

Diversity of Students

The College has hundreds of students from across the world, such as UK, France, Greece, Morocco, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, U.A.E, China and more.

Community Health Education in Unani Medicine - In-Person Programmes

The College provides community health education for those who are interested in benefitting from whole-person healthcare and medicine. This is a two-stage programme called Foundation in Natural Health which is run in-person worldwide. So far, it has been run in UK, USA, New Zealand, Morocco, and Spain. There are plans to run this programme in Canada, Spain and Australia.

Community Health Education in Unani Medicine - Online Programmes

The College offers the Life Balance & Healthy Living online programme, available for those who are unable to attend in-person. This unique online programme aims to bring foundational principles and practices of Tibb into every home.

The concept of temperaments is a central key in the Unani tradition, which offers a personalised and individualised approach to health and wellbeing. The College offers The Golden Key to Discovering Yourself online programme for those who wish to access this profound and valuable understanding to help improve their health and relationships. [7]

Professional Diploma Programmes in Unani Medicine

Those who complete Foundation in Natural Health can go on to a Professional Diploma programme. The aim is for the graduate is to be able to run a safe, effective, legal, and financially sustainable practice based on the Tibb tradition, incorporating useful knowledge and skills from Complimentary & Alternative Medicine (CAM).

The College currently offers two separate Professional Diploma programmes:

- Diploma in Herbal & Naturopathic Medicine (Tibb)
- Diploma in Counselling & Psychotherapy (Nafsiyat)

Whole-Person Education and Facilitation

Authentic Traditional Education

The programme is based on the epistemology and wholistic cosmology found within the authentic Tibb tradition. There is a great emphasis on understanding the constitution and the Mizaj of the individual.

Life balance is another very important theme, using the six essential lifestyle factors throughout the programme as many individual's lives are imbalanced due to modern lifestyle, in particular use of new technologies.

Whole-Person Facilitation

The facilitation and training is done with a focus on the whole person. The theme of 'physician heal thyself' runs throughout the programme. Each student learner is expected to demonstrate integration of the theory into practice specifically in their own personal and professional life.

The training happens in small groups so that individual attention can be given to each learner. Retreats are another feature of the training selecting the most natural environments in which participants can experience connection with nature and be reintegrated into the healing qualities which nature provides.

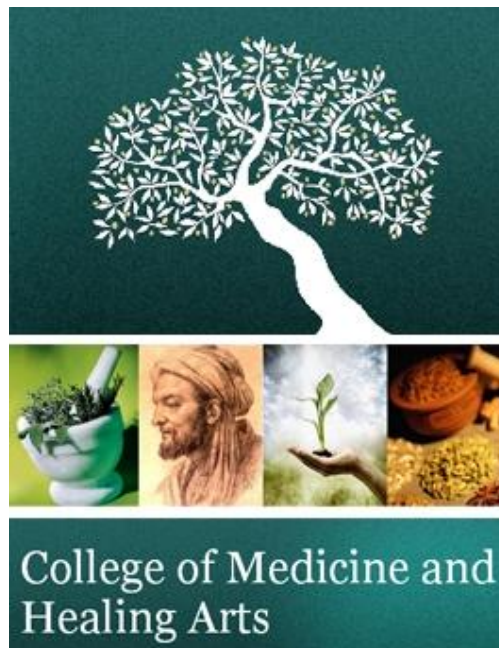
Sustainability and Regional Resources

Safe and effective medicaments are taught to each student from the classics of Unani Tibb, while incorporating safe herbs found in the traditional herbal medicine in UK. An emphasis is placed on locally sourced organic foods and medicaments.

There are practical workshops on basic cooking and nutrition that each student is expected to understand and learn so that they can practice this in their own life and later on teach their patients.

Bespoke Course Manuals

The College over many years has formulated bespoke course manuals from reliable and authentic sources from Unani Tibb as resources for teaching these programmes. These manuals are also informed by useful and relevant knowledge from complementary and alternative medicine (CAM).



Notes

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References

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Biography

M. Salim Khan is in practice and teaching since 1978. He is the Principal of College of Medicine and Healing Arts UK; President of the International Register for Consultant Medical Herbalists; President of the International Association of Natural Medicine; President of the Guild of Naturopathic Iridologists International; Trustee of the World Unani Foundation, New Dehli, India.

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