



## Healing Together: The Scope of Integrative Approach in Present Era

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### ABSTRACT

Background: Integrative health approaches which combine conventional medicine with complementary and alternative medicine, are gaining support to strengthen the healthcare system. The increasing prevalence of chronic diseases, patient demand for personalized care, and growing supportive research emphasize the relevance of integrated care in modern medical practice. Objectives: The aim is to explore the scope and impact of integrative health approaches in the present era, highlighting its advantages, challenges, and future prospects. Methods: A comprehensive review of literature from peer-reviewed journals and books was conducted along with collaboration of own views with a focus on relevance and current applicability. Key areas included are related to patient outcomes, healthcare provider perspectives, and system-level implications of integrative health practices. Results: Integrative health approaches done so far have shown promising results in enhancing patient outcomes, particularly in chronic disease management, pain relief, and mental health. Patients reported higher satisfaction and improved quality of life when integrative methods were employed. Healthcare providers acknowledged the value of these approaches in offering more personalized and holistic care. However, challenges such as lack of standardized protocols, insufficient insurance coverage, and varying levels of provider training were identified. Despite these hurdles, integrative health is progressively finding its way into the mainstream healthcare systems globally. Conclusion: The scope of integrative health strategies in the present era is significant, with considerable potential to improve patient outcomes and satisfaction. While challenges remain, the good research and policy frameworks that promote the continued integration of conventional and alternative therapies can enhance quality of care provided. Future efforts should focus on standardizing practices, increasing accessibility, and fostering interdisciplinary collaboration to fully realize the benefits of integrative health.

**Keywords:** Integrative health, Integrated care, Healthcare system, Holistic care, Complementary and alternative medicine.

### INTRODUCTION

In today's swiftly evolving healthcare sector, the challenges faced by healthcare systems are multifaceted and dynamic. From the rise of chronic diseases to the growing demand for personalized care, the complexities of current healthcare require innovative solutions that can effectively address the diverse needs of patients. One such solution gaining momentum is the integration of conventional medicine with traditional and complementary therapies, collectively known as integrative medicine.

At present, the era began where there is a need for collaboration or integration among all health care systems. There is a need for integration, Norman Cousins aptly said “*Integration is a basic law of life; when we resist it, disintegration is the natural result, both inside and outside of us. Thus, we came to the concept of harmony through integration.*” Similarly, the concept of harmony through integration has emerged, aiming to unite various medical systems to strengthen the healthcare sector with the following objectives:

- To combat various disorders.
- To maintain individual health.
- To protect the human race from emerging diseases.

The scope of integrative medicine in the present era extends far beyond representing a paradigm shift in healthcare with the potential enhancing patient outcomes, optimizing healthcare delivery, and promoting holistic well-being. As healthcare systems continue to evolve to meet the needs of patients in the 21st century, integrative medicine with their unique fundamentals principles offers a transformative approach that embraces the best of both conventional and complementary medicine, ultimately empowering patients to live healthier.

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## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The integration and practice with the help of other pathies have been opted for since long ago with the primary goal being to provide the most beneficial treatment for the patient. This approach is supported by various references in ancient texts such as the *Charaka Samhita*. Acharya Charaka, in his discussions on treatment, clearly emphasized the importance of referring patients to specialists from the *Dhanwantari* tradition or indicating that certain conditions should be treated exclusively through surgical methods. For example, in *chikitsasthana* while explaining *Gulma chikitsa* (chapter 5, *shloka* number 63-64), *Prameha pidika* (chapter 6, *Shoka* number. 57), *Udara chikitsa* (chapter 13, *shloka* number. 184-186), *Arsha chikitsa* (Chapter 14, *shloka* number. 34), etc. stated that preference should be given to *Shalaya chikitsak* of *Dhanwantari sampradaya*. These references highlight the long-standing tradition of integrating various medical disciplines to achieve the best outcomes for patients, with a particular emphasis on referring to or consulting with specialists when necessary.

**Evidence of successful integration** - Numerous studies have demonstrated that integrating complementary therapies into conventional care had improved symptoms, reduced side effects of treatments, and enhanced quality of life of patients. By showing outcomes, the institutes like NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences) and AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences) became role models in development of integrative approach in India.

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## DISCUSSION

### *Is Integration Possible?*

Yes, Of Course, a fruitful Integration is possible. Here some aspects related to the integration of Ayush are mentioned below:

1. Government Initiatives: Government should take steps to incorporate the integration approach at various levels of healthcare by integrating AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa Rigpa and Homeopathy) with allopathic medicine at primary, secondary, and tertiary healthcare levels.

**Primary Level** - At this level, the integration involves promoting preventive healthcare and wellness practices through community health centers and primary care clinics. This includes incorporating Ayush principles such as lifestyle modifications, dietary recommendations, and yoga therapy alongside conventional health promotion strategies. Additionally, training primary care providers in basic Ayush interventions can enhance the breadth of services available to patients.

**Secondary Level** - At the secondary level, integration focuses on providing comprehensive care by combining Ayush and allopathic treatments within district hospitals and specialty clinics. This may involve establishing AYUSH wings or departments within existing healthcare facilities, where patients can access a range of services including Ayurvedic therapies (*Panchakarma* theaters), Unani medicines, and Homeopathic treatments alongside conventional medical care.

**Tertiary Level** - Integration at the tertiary level entails creating centers of excellence and academic institutions that offer advanced research, education, and specialized care in both Ayush and allopathic disciplines. These centers serve as hubs for innovation, knowledge exchange, and collaborative research projects aimed at exploring synergies between traditional and modern medicine. By fostering interdisciplinary collaboration among researchers, clinicians, and educators it will contribute to evidence-based practice, professional development, and the evolution of integrative healthcare models.

The integration across various levels requires commitment from policymakers, healthcare providers, educators, and community stakeholders to overcome regulatory, logistical, and cultural barriers. By harnessing the complementary strengths of Ayush and allopathic medicine the integrated healthcare systems can offer more inclusive, effective, and patient-centered approach can address the diverse healthcare needs of populations worldwide.

2. Public Awareness with Acceptance - Integrating AYUSH into mainstream healthcare also requires increasing public awareness and acceptance of these systems. This can be dealt by educating the public about the principles and benefits of Ayush, addressing misconceptions, and promoting its use as a complementary or alternative healthcare option.
3. Health Ministry and Ministry of Ayush should confront with other influencers and speakers those impacted with their speeches, should deliver lectures addressing the importance of utilizing various healthcare systems effectively within society, particularly among professionals. The aim is to convey a message that encourages the optimal use of different systems, ensuring they are employed judiciously and appropriately to benefit patients in diverse healthcare scenarios.
4. Regulatory Framework - Developing and implementing regulations for Ayush practices, including standards for education, training, and practice, is crucial for integration. The Government often creates regulatory bodies to oversee these aspects and ensure quality control and patient safety.
5. Education and Training- The training to every healthcare professionals can be done by conducting specialized programs for existing healthcare professionals of every domain by collaboration between Ayush practitioners and conventional medical professionals.

6. Research and Evidence-based Practice - Encouraging research into Ayush practice and treatment will help to build evidence for their efficacy and safety, which is essential for acceptance within mainstream healthcare. This includes clinical trials, observational studies, and fundamental research to interpret the mechanisms of action of Ayush therapies.
7. Social media - The importance of conveying the right message over social media impacts especially when it comes to integrating and accepting various systems like Ayush (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa Rigpa and Homeopathy) into mainstream healthcare. Pseudoscientific claims can often misrepresent these traditional systems, leading to misunderstandings and potential harm. Ensuring that accurate information is shared on social media platforms, it is crucial for the adaptability and acceptance of Ayush systems. Prohibiting the use of terms like "pseudoscience" in association with Ayush could help protect the integrity of these traditional Indian medicines. Additionally, enforcing strict actions by governing bodies against misleading claims can help maintain credibility and trust in these systems.
8. **Various approaches for treatment [Figure No.1]**

There are various approaches stated by different pathies that can be adopted to treat particular ailments such as-

- An ailment related to human BODY can be dealt with – AYUSH + Allopathic system of medicine. By merging these systems approaches, patients can benefit from a broader range of therapeutic options, leading to improved health outcomes and well-being.
  - Disorders related to MIND are best dealt through a combination of therapies from various medical systems. Ayurveda (*Panchakarma* + *shamana aushadhis* + diet) + Yoga (*Ashtanga yoga* especially *asana*, *pranayama* and *dhyana*) + Modern techniques for understanding of diverse nature of human mind (counseling + investigations like EEG) + Unani (Exhilarants). Thus, we can restore balance, enhance mental stability, improve understanding of the human mind, can uplift and stabilize mental health.
  - Spiritual health – Ayurveda (*Satvik* diet, *sadvrta palana*, *dinacharya* and *brahmacharya*) + Yoga (*Pranayama*, *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*) + Naturopathy + Siddha (life arts - wisdom)
9. Generate curiosity to learn for life by everything (i.e by every medical system) to provide quality care.
  10. Respecting other systems of medicine is essential for doctors to provide comprehensive care, it can be achieved by educating professionals about alternative and traditional healing practices, remaining open-minded, and fostering collaboration with practitioners of different modalities, thereby doctors can offer patients a wider range of treatment options.
  11. Preference of reference – Recognize the other pathies and give importance to their expertise. Try to provide the best to the patient and can refer to other pathies if they are best in that particular domain. We should leave the crown of supremacy in every domain.
  12. Need of AYUSH - based collaborative OPDs in every Government hospitals.
  13. Translation of books and accelerate publication so that the basics of each system can be understood by every professional of another system.
  14. Incorporating a syllabus in undergraduate degrees of every medical system to learn about the basics and approaches of other pathies could indeed be a proactive solution in fostering a positive attitude towards each healthcare system. By including modules or courses that provide insights into alternative and traditional medical practices, students can develop a deeper understanding and appreciation for the diversity of healthcare modalities. This initiative not only promotes cultural competence and respect for different healing traditions but also encourages collaboration and interdisciplinary learning among future healthcare professionals.
  15. Creating ways to Approach towards other systems for their better understanding.
  16. Boosting fellowship programs (Post Doctoral Fellowship) or courses in other branches, such as emergency medicine and yoga, has significantly enrich the healthcare landscape and cater to diverse patient needs. Similarly, promoting fellowship courses in other complementary therapies can offer healthcare practitioners valuable insights into holistic approaches to health and wellness, including stress management, pain relief, and improving overall quality of life. For instance, the *Swasthavrita* and *Dinacharya* regulation of Ayurveda based courses will be fruitful for other pathies.
  17. Government support for promotional activities showcasing all healthcare systems in one place, such as in expos or health fairs, could indeed be a beneficial initiative. By bringing together representatives from various medical traditions, including conventional medicine, alternative therapies, and traditional medicine, these events can raise awareness about the diversity of healthcare options available to the public. Through interactive exhibits, workshops, demonstrations, and informational sessions, attendees can learn about different treatment modalities, their cultural significance, and potential benefits simultaneously. Moreover, such events can facilitate networking and collaboration among healthcare professionals from different backgrounds, developing a more integrated and inclusive healthcare ecosystem. Government sponsorship and promotion of these initiatives demonstrate a commitment to supporting holistic approaches to health and well-being while empowering individuals to make informed choices about their healthcare journey.
  18. Global Network establishment – The MoUs and agreements will help in global recognition and acceptance and also international exchange of knowledge of different systems will be beneficial. It will take up to greater heights and further will open the way for integration.

19. Collaborative research projects in similar domains are required to boost integration.
20. Export of various drugs with their authenticity, safety and efficacy may widen the area of acceptance and build the confidence for use of various system medicines especially the traditional medicines. Thereby it will become a source of collaboration for various purposes such as education, research, pharmaceuticals and Hospitals.
21. As a preventive health medicine, Ayurveda and other pathies if incorporated into defense services, will help to accelerate the establishment of traditional medicine at the same pace, on the same platform with the conventional medicinal system. Especially if Panchakarma theaters are opened for wellness.
22. For strengthening each system for collaboration, the budget allocation should be proposed according to the need of growth so that every pathy can withstand for collaboration with inbuilt strong foundations that may require more money.
23. Technology if it is adapted in every sector then it will help to bring every system to an equal level, further, it will help for easy integration. A portal for Citizen access with All the systems of medicines may bring a change.

This integration will be done with ease if the objective is just to save lives and maintain health. Afterall, necessity discovers the way to integrate.

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## **AN OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUES WITHIN INDIA'S HEALTHCARE SYSTEM IN PRESENT ERA**

India's healthcare system faces significant challenges, including inadequate infrastructure especially in rural areas, and a severe shortage of healthcare professionals. Also, the quality of care varies widely. The high expenses and limited insurance coverage create financial barriers for many. Also, policy implementation suffers from fragmentation and a lack of coordination between central and state governments. All such things demand a comprehensive and integrated approach to reform.

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### **INITIATIVES AND ACHIEVEMENTS – Have paved the Way for Integration:**

- Allopathy interns are made compulsory to undergo a specific period of internship in Ayurveda hospitals is a commendable initiative.
- Information, education and Communication (IEC) Activities will enhance Integration.
- NCISM has mandated the establishment of ICUs in Ayurveda hospitals to ensure optimal care for critically ill patients. This necessitates the recruitment of faculty and staff from the modern medical system, facilitating the exchange of knowledge and fostering awareness of Ayurveda and Modern treatment modalities. This initiative also encourages collaboration between the two systems.<sup>1</sup>
- Ayurgyan Scheme and Ayurwashya Scheme has Public Health component that will impact for various collaborations.<sup>2,3</sup>
- Insurance claims for complementary and alternative medicine.<sup>4</sup>
- Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri - Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY)<sup>5</sup> – Integrating AYUSH into the AB PM-JAY initiative can significantly enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of healthcare services for all segments of society by offering a more comprehensive range of treatment options to beneficiaries i.e by providing access to traditional therapies alongside conventional medicine.

All these ways add wings for integration.

### **IMPACT OF WHO Collaborative Centre for Traditional Medicine (Ayurveda)<sup>6</sup>**

The establishment of WHO collaborative Centre for Traditional Medicine in Jamnagar will help to position Ayurveda across the globe. This significant step ultimately validates the treatment modalities and proves the impact of Ayurveda practice globally, it will subsequently facilitate its seamless integration with other healthcare systems worldwide.

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## **ADVANTAGES OF INTEGRATION**

- The collaboration between different healthcare disciplines promotes an patient-centered approach.
- Stronger relationships with patients can be built by embracing a model of care that considers the individual preferences, beliefs, and values by healthcare providers. It will generate trust, more satisfaction as well as engagement in treatment plans.
- The integrative care has the potential to enhance patient outcomes both in research and clinical practice.
- Integration can enhance efficiency by saving time and reducing costs as well as enabling the simultaneous utilization of multiple resources.
- Easy access to top-quality treatment for patients, which is derived as combination from various medical systems.
- Medical tourism could be revolutionized by Integration. By integrative care, we will diversify the range of services offered and better cater to the needs of patients.

- Integration can generate employment opportunities for healthcare professionals.
- The burden of a single medical system can be alleviated by distributing it among multiple medical systems when united.
- Furthermore, it will contribute to enhance the skills of professionals for the management of various ailments.

Overall, the scope of integration in the present era will build a strong health care system.

## CONCLUSION

In the end, a true integration involves a comprehensive approach, merging concepts, policies, resources, and measures. It requires significant changes in the organization of healthcare, including public health, prevention, and treatment strategies. The collaboration with the WHO is a big achievement for recognition of Traditional Medicine all over the globe. This initiative will add wings for collaboration and acceptance of the integration of various systems of healthcare for safeguarding the health of the Nation. By combining the best aspects of each healthcare system, we can ensure that every individual benefits from optimal care, which is achievable only through integration. Our Mission should be – “Health to all by All”. This strategic excellence can be a transformative journey in the health sector. The scope of integrative health approaches in the present era is significant, with considerable potential to improve patient outcomes and satisfaction.

*“SOME FUSIONS BRING REVOLUTIONS. LET’S DESIGN THE NEW HEALTHCARE SYSTEM”*

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Figure 1 - Integration of medical sciences.