Exploring the Spectrum of Ancient and Advanced Medicine: An India Travelogue

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Introduction & Background

- The Indian healthcare system is an evolving network of public and private sectors that provides a wide range of medical services, from traditional practices dating back over 3,000 years to specialized care in tertiary hospitals with support from government schemes.
- Homeopathic and Ayurvedic medicine plays a significant role in India's healthcare landscape, with strong cultural acceptance and government support. Many residents trust homeopathy for chronic conditions.[3,5]
- Ayushman Bharat Health Scheme, launched in 2018, aims to provide financial protection for healthcare services at government and empaneled private hospitals to millions of low-income families in cities like Hyderabad.[1,2]
- In December 2023, I visited homeopathic clinics and specialized hospitals in Hyderabad and gained perspectives on healthcare from alternative and allopathic medicine doctors practicing in the city.

Aims

Through gaining insight from providers in homeopathy and specialized care in Hyderabad, I aim to discuss:

1. The widespread use of homeopathic and Ayurvedic medicine and beliefs surrounding its role in healthcare in India.
2. The benefits and challenges of the Ayushman Bharat Health Scheme for patients and providers.

Homeopathic & Ayurvedic Medicine

- Homeopathic medicine clinics in Hyderabad are provided government support by the Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy) and help establish accessible and affordable alternative treatments for patients with chronic conditions.[4]
- My aunt and uncle are Ayurvedic medicine doctors in the city of Hyderabad. They proudly opened their own homeopathic medicine clinic 35 years ago which was named after my aunt – the Aruna Clinic.
- As alternative medicine practitioners, they describe the benefits of homeopathic and Ayurvedic medicine as affordable, culturally aligned options with fewer side effects for chronic conditions. They discussed the new wave of "wellness tourism" [Fig. 1] in India – "The same treatments that are offered to the poor at urban clinics are also sought out by tourists at tropical resorts."



Figure 1: A tourist tries "nasya" treatment, a remedy for chronic sinusitis and headaches.



Figure 2: Turmeric is known for its anti-inflammatory properties and is largely harvested at local markets.



Figure 3: Students learn about anatomy at an Ayurvedic medical college, similar to education in allopathic schools.

Ayushman Bharat Health Scheme

- As of September 2024, the Ayushman Bharat health scheme offers each family in need of health insurance coverage of up to Rs. 5 lakhs annually for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.[6]
- Providers in Hyderabad generally view the health scheme as a positive step toward increasing access to healthcare for low-income populations.
- Dr. Kiran Reddy, Orthopedic Surgeon, states "as providers, we sometimes have to make difficult choices with the Ayushman Bharat scheme. The devices and implants we can use are restricted to what is covered under the scheme's reimbursements guidelines, which are often the most basic options rather than what would be truly optimal for the patient.



Figure 4: An example of the Ayushman Bharat insurance card to be used at 29,648 eligible hospitals in India, including 12,696 private facilities.[6]

Summary Points

- Visiting homeopathic clinics in Hyderabad taught me how cultural beliefs shape healthcare in other countries, highlighting the importance of accessible, traditional treatments that resonate with patients' values and lifestyles.
- Providers in Hyderabad generally view the Ayushman Bharat health scheme as beneficial for expanding healthcare access to low-income patients, but I also learned about the challenge of limited choices for devices and implants under the scheme's reimbursement guidelines.

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