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“A REVIEW OF GERIATRIC HEALTH PROBLEMS & PREVENTIVE CARE FOR OLDER ADULTS THROUGH AYURVEDA.”

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ABSTRACT:

Ageing is a natural process of physical, psychological and social change in multi-dimensional aspects. Old age is regarded as a normal, inevitable biological phenomenon. The study of the physical & psychological changes which are incident to old age is called gerontology. The care of the aged is called clinical gerontology or geriatrics. Experimental gerontology is concerned with research into the basic biological problems of ageing, into its physiology, biochemistry, pathology & psychology¹ According to *Ayurveda*, ageing is outcome of *Kala* or *parinama*. *Vata Dosha* is most important factor in the patho-physiology of ageing, because *Vata Dosha* is prominent in old age. *Jarachikitsa* or *Rasayana* in *Ayurveda* is a unique therapeutic methodology to delay ageing and to minimize the intensity of problems occurring in this degenerative phase of one's life. Prevention & management of health problems could help the elderly to improve quality of life & remain self dependant for their daily activities to maximum possible extent.² In India, there has been a sharp increase in the number of elderly persons between 1991 & 2001 & it has been projected that by the year 2050, the number of elderly people would rise to what about 324 million.³

Hence, there is need to highlight the problems of the old aged people. This article is based on Descriptive Research Study which explored strategies for improvement in their life.

Keywords: Geriatrics, Ageing, *Rasayana*, Geriatrics in *Ayurveda*, Geriatric care.

INTRODUCTION

Discoveries in medical science and improved social conditions during past few decades have increased the life span of man. The expectation of life at birth in developed countries is over 70 years. In India, although the percentage of aged persons to the total population is low in comparison to the developed countries, nevertheless, the absolute size of aged population is considerable. For the year 2010 the estimates are 8 percent of total population were above the age of 60 years, and is likely to rise to 19% by 2050. This profound shift in the share of older Indians brings with it a variety of social, economic & healthcare policy challenges.

Hence, there is a need to highlight the medical & socio-economic problems that are being faced by the elderly people in India & strategies for bringing about an improvement in their quality of life also need to be explored.

Ayurveda gives top priority to geriatrics. The word geriatric has also a close link with the *Sanskrit* word *Jiryadi* which means degenerated. According to *Ayurveda*, human body consists of three *Doshas* (*Vata, Pitta, Kapha*), *Saptadhatus* (*Rasa, Rakta, Mamsa, Medas, Asthi, Majja & Shukra*) and three *Malas* (*Mutra, Purisha & Sveda*).⁴ The *Dhatus* get degenerated due to the body's prolonged

structural changes. During old age we cannot enhance the capacity of *Dhatus*, but it can be protected & rejuvenated.

In *Ayurveda*, human body has been described as a living subject where the wear & tear is a continuous & perpetual phenomenon. As the age advances body become fragile, digestion & metabolism gets weakened & the body succumbs to various diseases.

Ageing is a process of physical, psychological & social change in multidimensional aspects. *Ayurveda*, the Indian traditional holistic health science has got the potential for prevention of diseases by promotion of health & management of diseases occurring in old age. *Ayurveda* has broad spectrum of preventing measures for combating the ageing process.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the concept of ageing.
2. To understand the health problems of the aged.
3. To understand & elaborate preventive measure in Geriatrics.

MATERIALS & METHODS

The article is based on,

- ✓ review of modern books
- ✓ *Ayurvedic* texts books
- ✓ Internet
- ✓ web sites
- ✓ Journals.

- Concept of ageing:

According to *Ayurveda* the lifespan of an individual is divided into three parts-

Balavastha (upto the age of 16 years)

Madhyvastha (from age of 16 years to 60-70 years) &

Vriddhavastha or *Jirnavastha* (old age) (above 60-70 years).

Vriddhavastha is a period where various decaying changes take place. This stage is characterized by decay in the body, *Dhatu*, perception power of the *Indriya*, potency, strength, speech, various mental & cognitive functions. During this phase there is a predominance of *Vata Dosha*. The major physical changes seen at this time are wrinkling of skin, graying of hair, baldness and a diminishing ability to do physical work.

According to *Ayurveda*, growth, development & maintenance of the body is completely dependent on four factors- *Kala* (time), *Svabhava* (nature), *Ahara*/diet & *Vighata Abhava*. Among these, diet is very important factor in ageing *Tridoshas* process. Improper diet vitiated, which leads to various progressive pathological changes & *Vriddhavastha* begins earlier. This is known as

Akalaja Vriddhavastha (untimely ageing). It can be managed & treated.

- Health problems of the aged:

Health problems of the aged are categorized as follows:

I. Problems due to the ageing process :

- a) Senile cataract
- b) Glaucoma
- c) Nerve deafness
- d) Osteoporosis affecting mobility
- e) Emphysema
- f) Failure of special senses
- g) Changes in mental outlook.

II. Problems associated with long term illness –

- a) Degenerative diseases of heart & blood vessels.
- b) Cancer
- c) Accidents
- d) Diabetes
- e) Diseases of locomotor system
- f) Respiratory illness
- g) Genitourinary system

III. Psychological problems:

- a) Mental changes
- b) Sexual changes
- c) Emotional changes. Preventive measures:⁵

According to modern science, recommended preventive care for adults 65 years and older are as follows:

Vaccination :

Influenza vaccine (annual)
Pneumococcal vaccine (one time)
Tetanus vaccine (every 10 years)
Zoster (shingles) vaccine (one time)
Screening

Alcohol use screening & counselling
Breast cancer screening (mammography every 1-2 years)
1. Blood pressure screening
2. Colon cancer screening (up to age 75)
3. Depression screening
4. Diabetes screening
5. Lipid disorder screening
6. Obesity screening
7. Osteoporosis screening
8. Ultrasound to screen for abdominal aortic aneurysm (one time screen for men aged 65-75 who have ever smoked).

Preventive Actions:

Primary prevention:

1. Geriatric outpatient department services should be available in primary health care centres.
2. Medical officers should be trained in geriatric medicines.
3. Peripheral health workers & community health volunteers should be trained to identify & refer elderly patients for timely & proper treatment.
4. Primary prevention includes various components such as knowledge & awareness about disease conditions & steps for their prevention & management,

good nutrition & balanced diet & physical exercises.

5. It also includes meditation, prayer, and motivation for the promotion of a positive mind-set.

Secondary prevention:

1. Geriatric wards should be set up in district hospital, sub district & medium size private hospitals.
2. These wards should fulfil the specific needs of the geriatric population by provision of district OPD services, screening services, curative & rehabilitative services & convalescent homes to provide long term care.

Tertiary prevention:

1. It comprises of super speciality & medical college hospitals.
2. "multi disciplinary team" specifically trained to meet the needs of the geriatric population need to be created. This team would be comprised of a physician, psychiatrist, orthopaedician, diabetologist, dietician, dentist & nurses trained in geriatric medicine.
3. Elderly patients from poor & low income should be supplied with free or reasonably priced treatment.
3. Day care hospitals would play an important role in providing close supervision & follow up of patients with chronic diseases.

Preventive measures, according to Ayurveda are:

1. Daily regimen (*Dinacharya*)
2. Seasonal regimen (*Ritucharya*)
3. Tripods of life (*Trayopastambha*)
4. *Samshodhana* (*Panchakarma*)
5. *Rasayana*

1. Daily regimen (Dinacharya) ⁶

The Ayurvedic regimen of right living is designed for maintenance of health achievement of a long, healthy active life, providing relief from pain & disease thereby achieving satisfactory enjoyment of life & attainment of self realization.

Wake up at *Brahma- muhurt*

Achaman

anta dhavan & Jivha Nirlekhan (cleansing of mouth)

shapan

vowels

Gandush & Kavala

Dhumapana

asya

Eye care

Tambul sevana (Betel chewing)

Abhyanga (oil massage)

Rarnatarpan (eye care)

dvaartana

amvahana

yayama (exercise)

Snana (bath)

Regular physical activity can improve mood & relieves stress. It reduces

depression & anxiety. Bath with lukewarm water is advised after physical exercise for cleaning of body. Bath relieves tiredness, sweating, drowsiness & thirst. It increases appetite, age & strength.

Dinacharya makes one to lead a healthy & disciplined life. According to the latest studies in the field of medical science, people who stick to the daily routine are fit than those, who do not have a particular time to perform their everyday activities. It reduces the stress level, purifies & detoxifies the body. In addition *Sadvritta*, *Dhyana & Yoga* therapy & *Pranayam* makes sound mental health.

2. Ritucharya :⁷

Ayurveda focuses on living in tune with nature. It recognizes the intimate relationship between the individual & environment. *Ayurveda* recognizes that seasonal changes have a profound effect on our health & recommends many helpful suggestions to stay balanced in each season. This is known as *Ritucharya*. It helps to maintain *Dosha Samya* to promote *Swasthavritta*.

According to *Acharya Charak* there are six *Ritus* (seasons). They are *Hemant*, *Shishir*, *Vasant*, *Grishma*, *Varsha* & *Sharad*. They advised *Ritucharya* to maintain the health.

3. Tripods of life (Trayopastambha)⁸

In *Ayurveda*, *Ahara* (diet), *Nidra* (sleep) & *Brahmacharya* (controlled sex) are regarded as three pillars or tripods of healthy living. It is important for our body to be adjusted to timely intake of good quality & proper food, regular sleeping habits & controlled indulgence in sex in order to ensure long & healthy life. This practice promotes life & preserves health but also give enrichment to the soul & other cognitive organs along with the mind which can prevent various ailments of old age.

4.Ahara:

Elderly people have different nutritional requirements. With increasing age, people become more vulnerable to malnutrition for many reasons including *Arochaka*, medication, disease like *Smritinasha*, *Manovasada*, stroke, *Kampavata* & other neurological disorders, poor dentition, delayed gastric emptying, swallowing problems, oral infections, taste changes & diminished smell sensation. They predisposing to dehydration particularly in case of fever & diarrhoea. Therefore fluid intake is necessary to replace physiological losses, better digestion & intestinal function & renal clearance. There is no change in absorption of fats & carbohydrates, whereas vitamin D & calcium absorption is impaired, which leads to their deficiency. Calcium intake

along with vitamin D is necessary to prevent bone mineral loss in elderly.

5.Dietary plan for elderly

The food should be tasty, nutritious, fresh & good in appearance.

Avoid too spicy, salty & pungent food.

It should neither be very hot nor very cold.

Liquid intake should be more frequent & in small amount.

Heavy food should not be given at night.

Night meal should be 2-3 hours before going to bed.

Advice for short walk after dinner.

Heavy physical work should be avoided after meals. Mind should be peaceful while eating. Eating only whenever hungry & avoidance of over eating. Inclusion of sufficient amount of vegetables & fruits in diet. Daily intake of vegetable soup & fruit juices. Top alcohol intake. Up to 3.5 lit water intake per day is advisable. Milk & Ghee are the *Agryaushadha* of senility. Patient with hyperlipidaemia, ischemic heart disease, obesity should use this in moderate quantity.

6.Nidra (sleep)

It is a physiological condition of the body, sense & motor organs & mind. Sleeping is a way to repair damaged cells.

7. Panchakarma:

Panchakarma therapy, which is effective in cleansing of body toxins. The detoxification process is necessary for

eliminating the toxic waste from the organic system & thereby assuring smooth & natural organic function.

8. *Rasayana* (Rejuvenation):⁹

The strength of Ayurveda in the context of Geriatric care is *Rasayana* therapy. *Rasayana* is stand as an answer in preventing premature ageing & to solve the problems due to ageing; it also ensures healthful longevity including mental health & resistance against various geriatric disease conditions.

Achara Rasayana itself bring many bimolecular level *Rasayana* effects. The complete positive & promotive health care is achieved through *Achara Rasayana*.

Rasayana increases the general immunity. There are specific *Rasayana* for different age groups, which help in restoring the loss of specific bio-values of respective ages. Regular use of Ghee, milk, fruits & vegetables in diet acts as *Rasayana*.

OBSERVATIONS:

Acharya Charak, explained *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*, *Trayopstambha*, *Achar Rasayan*, *Rasayana chikitsa* as a preventive measures in old age peoples health problems.

Acharya Vagbhat also described same measures to deal with the geriatric problems.

Modern science developed new branch of Gerontology which prevents many geriatric diseases through vaccination & healthy diet.

DISCUSSION:

'*Swasthavritta*, a special branch of *Ayurveda* deals with the science of health & the code for a healthy conduct. '*Swasthavritta*' is conduct. Literally a guideline to the path of healthy & long life. The principles of maintaining a proper wellbeing of the body & mind are incorporated in *Ayurveda* in form of *Dinacharya*, *Ritucharya*, balanced diet & the observance of personal, moral, seasonal & spiritual conduct. *Ayurveda* also prescribes *Sadvritta*. The right ways of living i.e. following good mental, social, religious, personal & moral conduct which may help to overcome the feeling of stress & fatigue in the fast pace life. The stress is a major factor responsible for various ailments of old age. *Rasayana* therapy is useful for disease free long life & helps in uplifting the quality of their life by manipulating ageing process & disease process.

CONCLUSION

Old age is an undesirable & inevitable phase of human life. Though the disturbance in the equilibrium in all the three *Doshas* occurs during the old age, there is dominance of *Vata Dosha* in this

age. Quantity & quality of *Dhatus* decreases. The combination of dominant state of *vata dosha* & deterioration of *Rasadi Dhatu, Strotas & Agni* are responsible for the various degenerative changes & process of decay in the body. The principle of healthy lifestyle which include a proper routine regarding *Ahara, Vihara & Acharas*.

Geriatric care warrants management of *Agni, Ama & Oja* at biological level. *Rasayana* drugs which compensate the age related bio-losses in the body & provide rejuvenating effect, act primarily at the level of *Rasa Dhatu, Agni & Strotas*.

In short, combining *Rasayana therapy*, wholesome diet, *Dinacharya, Ritucharya, Sadvritta, Yoga*, time to time *Panchakarma*, vaccination, screening programmes & preventive measures are likely to develop an effective package for geriatric care today.

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