The School of Traditional Iranian Medicine
The Definiton, Origin and Advantages

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Summary

Traditional Iranian Medicine (TIM) consists of the sum total of all the knowledge and practices used in diagnosis, prevention and elimination in Persia from ancient times to now, from generation to generation relying exclusively on practical experience and observation handed down from generation to generation. TIM roots go back to over 2000 years ago and it is not too bold to go even further and claim that the Persians taught the Greeks the elements of that system of medicine, which has been known ever since as Greek medicine. Traditional medicine has special advantages with respect to all the imported medical systems; since it is considered as part of the people's culture; and has a significant role in solving some of the cultural issues of health. Simply, traditional medicine can be a good assistant and help to the scientific and universal medicine. Introduction, development, and promotion of traditional medicine are a respect and honor to the culture and heritage of the people all around the world.

Key Words: Traditional Iranian Medicine, Iran, Persia.

The School of TIM

TIM (1) is a school that views the world as a good and seeking discipline created by the wise and omniscient Almighty (2); and has named the physician a Hakim due to his dominance and proficiency in different sciences, and adequate comprehension of the world. The school of TIM, which its roots go back to over 2000 years ago; as quoted by Cyril Elgood, the English medical historian "was more advanced than that of Assyria. It is not too bold to go even further and claim that the Persians taught the Greeks the elements of that system of medicine, which has been known ever since as Greek medicine" (3). According to Ibn Khaldoon, Among Persians, rational sciences had a high status. Such sciences had a vast scope since Persians' governments were majestic and long-lasting. Words have it that after Darius' murder by Alexander and the occupation of Kelikiyeh, and access to the countless Persian books and sciences, such sciences were passed to the Greeks (4).

The stars of Islamic and Iranian medicine as Ibn Sina, Razi, Ali Ibn Abbas Raban Tabari, Majoosi Ahwazi, Ibn Abi al Sadegh Neishabouri, Seyed Ismail Jorjani held the leadership of medical schools in west and east at least for 5 centuries. Dr. Norman Howard-Jones has written in the World Health Organization (WHO) magazine of 1972 "the most important editor of medical books in Islam was Abu Ali Al Hosein Ibn Sina…. His medical book is named Ghanoon; and up to now never a book has been so famous; and it has been taught for a period of 500 years in the European and Asian medical schools" (4). Gustav Lobonne (1841-1931 AD) has written in his book about Islam and Arab Civilization "up to 15th century, the European scientists did not consider any quotation that was not quoted from the Arab authors as documented. All the European colleges and universities were in working order on these translations and the circle of our knowledge were just the Muslim sciences for five to six hundred years; and in some fields of science like medicine, we can say that it has remained up to the current period; since the writings of Avicenna has remained in France up to the end of the last century and some comments have been written about it (5). In their book History of Medicine, Meyer Steinegg and Karl Sudhoff have written "the effects of the Razi medicine in the European medicine was prevailing for consecutive centuries. His great book Alhavi fetbeh has been translated into Latin and for a long period it was the reference for the scholars of medical sciences" (6).
TIM not only transmitted the medical sciences of the ancient civilizations in a modern and compiled manner to the next generations; rather, the scientists of this school were the founders and pioneers of the observation method and scientific experiment. Avicenna explained the importance of clinical trials in addition to animal studies as proof of efficacy of drug. Ex professor Nayyar Wasti, who was one of the leaders of Pakistan traditional medicine has written about the importance of the role of Iran in the development of traditional medicine in the world: "Therefore, traditional medicine is Middle East medicine, specially Persian medicine; since a number of the expert and famous professors in the field were from Iran; and the medicine has been developed and promoted more in Iran and has been expanded all over the world by these authors. In the semi-continent of Pakistan and India, the books of Razi, Ibn Sina, and Molla Nafiss are still being studied in the medical courses; and day and night the names of these proficient and competent Iranian physicians are repeated; and thousands of thousands of patients are treated and cured by this method. Therefore, the government of Pakistan has approved some laws to promote and develop this technique" (7). Furthermore, Hakim Syed Zillur Raman has written about the role of Iranian physicians and scientists in the development of medical sciences in Indai: "A number of great Iranian physicians such as Abu Fateh Gillani, Fathollah Shirazi, Jallaldin Ardestani, Einolmalek Shirazi, Ali Gillani, Bagher Tabrizi, Mohammad Hashem Shirazi, Seyed Mohammad Asfar, Hossein Esfahani who had resided in Indai, brought about the progress of Islamic medicine in India" (8).

**Definition of Traditional Medicine**

Since 30 years ago, in order to implement the slogan "Health for Everybody up to 2000 ", WHO has considered the development of traditional medicine. The decision is based on 2 foundations; first, lack of access of a great number of people to primary health/medical services, which in some countries covers up to 80 per cent of the population; and second, dissatisfaction from the treatments of modern medicine, specially in relation to chronic diseases and the side effects of chemical drugs (9). On this basis, WHO published a declaration regarding the development of traditional medicine in 1978. In this declaration the brief definition of traditional medicine is as follows: "The sum total of all the knowledge and practices, whether explicable or not, used in diagnosis, prevention and elimination of physical, mental or social imbalance and relying exclusively on practical experience and observation handed down from generation to generation, whether verbally or in writing" (10). In 2002 AD, WHO has described traditional medicine with more details as: "Traditional medicine is a comprehensive term used to refer both to TM systems such as traditional Chinese medicine, Indian Ayurveda and Arabic Unani medicine, and to various forms of indigenous medicine. Traditional medicine therapies include medication therapies - if they involve use of herbal medicines, animal parts and/or minerals- and non-medications - if they are carried out primarily without the use of medication, as in the case of acupuncture, manual therapies and spiritual therapies-. In countries where the dominant health care system is based on allopathic medicine, or where Traditional medicine has not been incorporated into the national health care system, Traditional medicine is often termed complementary, alternative or non-conventional medicine" (9). Considering the above definitions, we can divide TIM in to two sections:

**A- Written Traditional Medicine:**

This section includes the books and papers of Iranian scientists. That sums up to thousands of volumes. This huge collection contains different books about anatomy, principle of medicine, description of disease, materia medica, pharmacopoeia, diagnosis, and treatment. Some of them are: "Ghanoon fe Teb" by Ibn Sina, "Sharhe Asbab va Allamat" by Nafiss Ibn Avaz Kermani, "Alhavi" by Mohammad Ebn Zakaria Razi, "Al Eghraz Al Tabibeh" by Seyed Ismael Jorjani in Persian, "Ketab al Maleki" by Ali Ahvazi, "Al Abnieh An Haghayegh Al Advieh" by Heravi in Persian, "Kholasseh Al Tajareb" by Baha al Doleh Razi Tarashi, and "Ferdows Al Hakameh" by Ali Ibn Raban Tabari; and also professional papers about special subjects such as "Ressaleh Dar Nabz" by Ibn Sina in Persian and "Ressaleh Atfal" by Razi, and "Ressaleh Afyoonieh" by Emadaldin Shirazi in Persian about specialized issues for treatment of addiction to opium,
and "Ressaleh Atashak" by Emadodin about syphilis. This valuable heritage is a written treasure for the researchers in Iran and the world; and by the power of God, the value and importance of it will be more and more cleared for the humanity.

**B- Verbal Traditional Medicine:**

Includes the experiments and information that has been transmitted, heart to heart from a generation to another generation and contains different health and treatment methods (11). Since Iran has a long historical background and civilization, different races, languages, and climates, it is a country full of verbal medical experiments, opinions, and views; specially among the tribes and the residents of this country, that due to geographic reasons were difficult to pass; utilization of these medical experiments and treatment methods were integrated part of the life of people and the adequate recognition of the untrue and transfer of the experiments to the next generation was vital and essential. Compiling this part of TIM that nowadays is considered by the people of the world as native botany (Ethnobotany), native pharmacology (Ethnopharmacology), and native medicine (Ethnomedicine) has special significance; and delay and hesitation in collecting and documentation of them; results in loss of parts of this valuable experiments; experiments that may contain the key for solution of some of the medical intricate questions (12-14).

**Reasons for Restoration of TIM**

**1- Economic Role**

In many developed countries, certain CAM (Complementary Alternative Medicine) therapies are very popular. Various government and non-government reports state that the percentage of the population that has used CAM is 46% in Australia, 49% in France and 70% in Canada. The budgets allocated for traditional and CAM are also considerable; so that in Malaysia, an estimated US$ 500 million is spent annually on TM/CAM, compared to about US$ 300 million on allopathic medicine. In the USA, total 1997 out-of-pocket CAM expenditure was estimated at US$ 2700 million, which was comparable to the projected 1997 out-of-pocket expenditure for all physicians' services. In the United Kingdom, annual CAM expenditure is estimated at US$ 2300 million respectively (9). In Canada, it is estimated that a total of US$ 2400 million was spent in 1997-1997 on CAM. The global market for traditional therapies stands at US $60 billion a year and is steadily growing (19).

In Iran, the general statistics regarding the range of application of traditional medicine and different schools of supplementary medicine are not specified. However, the studies that were conducted in Isfahan in 2000 indicate that during the last 5 years, about 62.5% of the individuals have applied the supplementary medicine methods, at least once a year. Utilization of herbs, prayer-therapy, cupping, and acupuncture with 76.6, 10.1, 9.5, and 5.5 percent, were considered more than other methods, respectively. The sale of herbal medicine in Iran was about 7 billion Rials in 1997, which has raised to 37 billion Rials in 2000 (Fig. 1). Since about 50% of the visits made by the physicians does not need any drugs, if we use other treatment methods, the consumption of chemical drugs will be reduced and by exporting drugs we could place the country in a beneficial path and by this means decrease our dependence; since, there are newer chemical drugs that are certainly becoming more expensive on a daily basis … while our country is the origin of traditional medicine and variety of herbs with lots of medical features, variety, and high quality are considered as our valuable capitals (17).

**2- Simple Access and Low Cost**

There is a good drug variety in TIM; and usually there are a number of medicine for each disease, as prophet Mohammad (S) says "God didn't put any disease, but put for it many drugs" and this originates in the mercy of God, so that the servants would not be in trouble to maintain a drug, which is a genuine need and God says at Quran "and gave you all of you need exactly" and if a drug is not found in a region and or the patient annoyed a medicine; he could get advantage of other available medicine with the least expenses; and also if the nature of the patient is used to a drug and the medicine is no more effective, it would be possible to take advantage of other drugs (18). Drugs, quite often are materials that are avail-
able, including botanic, mineral, and animal substances that are available in the surroundings of the environment; and usually could be accessible with little expenditures and is not comparable with the excessive costs of chemical drugs.

**3- Reliance on Moral Aspects**

The roots of TIM could be found in Darolhekmah and Hozehelmyeh (House of the science and scientists) and was considered as a means for earning a low living. A large number of scientists and thinkers, were learning the beneficial science of medicine along with studying different sciences to maintain their own and other people's health; since according to the Prophet Mohammad "The best of you are who benefit more the people" and rendered their efforts in its propagation to the seekers of science; and believed that its moral reward will be their provisions for the road to the afterlife.

**4- Finding new Medicines and Treatment Methods**

Utilization of traditional experiments increases the probability of finding of effective medicine materials up to 40%; this range is about 1% in random researches. Medicines such as Canabinoides, Vincristine, Artemisinin, Opioids and Colchicine, Pilocarpin, Cantharidin, Spinal-Z (22), or other treatment methods such as acupuncture, general anesthesia, application of traction instrument in replacing the dorsal vertebrae of spinal columns, and using catheters for charging and discharging material in the vesica, take out the fetus by the hydrocephalus that creates dystochia? application of gold filament for fixing the mobile tooth and using the dental prosthesis that has been sculptured from the tooth of the cow are undeniable testimonies of this subject.

**Reasons for the Promotion of Traditional Medicine**

WHO believes (10) there are three points that have resulted in the development and promotion of traditional medicine:

**A- Intrinsic qualities:** Traditional medicine is already the people's own health care system and well accepted by them. It has certain advantages over imported systems of medicine in any setting because, as an integral part of the people's culture, it is particularly effective in solving certain cultural health problems. It can and does freely contribute to scientific and universal medicine. Its recognition, promotion and development would secure for a people's culture and heritage (10).

**B- Approach-unique and holistic:** Traditional medicine has a holistic approach, viewing man in his totality within a wide ecological spectrum, and of emphasizing the viewpoint that ill health or disease is brought about by an imbalance, or disequilibrium, of man in his total ecological system and not only by the causative agent and pathogenic evolution. (10).

**C- Operational factor:** There are some of the main reasons why traditional medicine needs to be promoted and developed. Perhaps, from the operational point of view, the most cogent reason for the radical development and promotion of traditional medicine is that it is one of the surest means to achieve total health care coverage of the world population, using acceptable, safe and economically feasible methods, by year 2000. (10).

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