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Depression – Let's Talk - Role of *Aashwasan Chikitsa*

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ABSTRACT

The WHO theme for the year 2017 is Depression. Depression (major depressive disorder) is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how a person feels, thinks and behaves. Psychotherapy if incorporated along with medications can be of substantial help in depression. It is also called 'talking therapy' and is based on personal interaction with the patient. Patients suffering from this disorder do not easily accept it and hence do not feel the need to seek medical intervention or counselling. In this process the symptoms might get aggravated and suicidal tendency (which is the worst effect of this disease) may develop. So it is extremely essential for the patient, family and society to accept, talk, discuss and seek treatment for this disease. This 'talking therapy' is of utmost importance in today's life where concept of privacy is taking its toll. This therapy is mentioned in *Ayurveda* as *Aashwasan Chikitsa*. *Aashwasan Chikitsa* consists of good, pleasing and benevolent thoughts, spiritual ideas, positive attitude, ethics and communication with near ones. So in the treatment of psychological disorders, along with medications counselling therapy plays a very important role. Finally counselling can act as a part of preventive, curative therapy and also aids to avoid recurrence in the patients of depression.

Key words: *Aashwasan Chikitsa, Counselling therapy, Depression.*

INTRODUCTION

World health day is celebrated on 7th April every year to mark the foundation day of World Health Organisation since the year 1948. Each year a theme related to some significant health issue is taken up. It helps to create awareness in society regarding this priority area of public health. It draws attention of public to these health events. It gives opportunity to the public to get involved in various health related activities. Many activities such as health camps, awareness lectures, research works concerned with

the selected issue are undertaken by the society, educational institutes, medical centres as well as government agencies. The themes of WHO in the last 5 years were 'Healthy heart beat, healthy blood pressure' (2013), 'Vector-borne disease' (2014), 'Food safety' (2015), 'Diabetes' (2016) and 'Depression – let's talk' (2017).^[1]

The WHO theme for the year 2017 is Depression. Depression (major depressive disorder) is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how a person feels, thinks and behaves. It causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed. According to an article published in 2010 the prevalence rate of unipolar depressive disorders is 1.9% in men and 3.2% in women.^[2] As mentioned in a report published by WHO about 7.5% Indians are suffering from major or minor mental disorders.^[3] A mental health survey done in October 2016 by National Institute of Mental Health and Neuroscience mentions that there is an increase by 18% in depression and anxiety disorders patients from 2005 to 2015.^[4] Almost 1 in 20 Indians suffer from depression, higher incidence being in females of age

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group 40-49 years. According to WHO, India has the highest suicide rate among 10 south – east Asian countries and depression is the major leading cause for suicides. There are 80 million patients of depression in south-east Asia alone. The suicide rate in the age group 15-29 years is 35.5 per lakh and 1 in 4 lakh in the age group 13-15 years. It is common in teens, adolescents, postpartum females and elderly people above 60 years.^[5] This is the reason why WHO recently declared depression as a leading cause of ill-health and disability world-wide. Hence there arose a need to declare depression as the theme for World Health Day 2017.

AIM

To co-relate the *Aashwasan Chikitsa* with counselling therapy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To elaborate the importance of counselling therapy in treatment of depression
2. To congregate the references of *Aashwasan* therapy in *Charak Samhita*
3. To compare *Aashwasan chikitsa* with counselling therapy

METHODOLOGY

The information about the WHO theme 2017 and counselling therapy were collected from the internet. Also all the references regarding *Aashwasan Chikitsa* were collected from *Charak Samhita* and *Chakrapani* commentary. The aspects of counselling and *Aashwasan Chikitsa* were studied.

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

The meaning of the word 'Depression' as explained in Oxford dictionary is 'a feeling of severe despondency and dejection (feeling of self-doubt)'.^[6] It is a common but serious mental disorder affecting the person's pattern of thinking, behaviour and moods. It has a prevalence of 5% in general population and about 10% in chronically ill patients. This disorder is, now-a-days, a leading cause for various non-communicable disorders/diseases, Diabetes, drug abuse and heart

disease. To be marked as depression the symptoms need to persist at least for 15 days.^[7]

Symptoms of depression

It is characterized by symptoms like persistent sadness, loss of energy, irregular sleep and appetite, weight changes (excessive loss or gain), various aches or digestive problems without any obvious reason, anxiety, irritability, decrease in concentration, indecisiveness, feeling of guilt or worthlessness, loss of interest in various activities or hobbies, thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

Causes of depression

- Tragic events like death or loss of a near one.
- Events like unemployment, failure in relationship or education, or other personal calamities.
- Physical or emotional abuse
- Medications like anti-epileptics, barbiturates
- Genetics
- Chronic illness
- Drug/ alcohol abuse
- Seasonal especially in winters (extreme cold places)
- Hormonal changes especially in thyroid disorders, menopause, child-birth.
- Decrease in levels of hormones like Serotonin, Dopamine, Nor-epinephrine.
- High stress levels and inability to cope up with it.

Treatment of depression

Depression is treated mostly by medicines, Psychotherapy and in failure of both, Electroconvulsive (brain stimulation) therapy.^[8]

The medications improve the way the brain reacts to certain chemicals which control moods or stress. Certain drugs like Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors, Serotonin-Nor-epinephrine reuptake inhibitors, Nor-epinephrine-Dopamine reuptake inhibitors, Tricyclic anti-depressants, MAO inhibitors etc. are used. The efficacy of these drugs differs from patient to patient.

So choosing the right medication is very important. Also, they cannot be stopped abruptly or doses cannot be missed, as they can worsen the symptoms. Sometimes dependency on these drugs is developed.^[9]

Psychotherapy if incorporated along with medications can be of substantial help to the patients.^[10] It is also called 'talking therapy' and is based on personal interaction with the patient. It helps the patient to deal with his/her symptoms in a positive manner. It involves a listener in form of the doctor, boosting the patient to speak and discuss about his/her symptoms. The responsibility of the doctor is to explain the patient regarding the symptoms, guiding them to deal with it practically and providing reassurance.

A study done to compare the effectiveness of counselling (psychotherapy) and anti-depressant drugs showed that counselling is as effective as anti-depressant medications.^[11] According to Glynis Sherwood, a counsellor, counselling focuses on recovery from anxiety and depression and prevents further such episodes. It is a permanent and effective technique which makes the individual more independent, self-reliant, thus helping to cure the disease.^[12]

One of the types of Psychotherapy is Cognitive Behaviour therapy (CBT).^[13] It involves the things you think and the things you do. The manner in which we think reflects on the way we feel and behave. Negative thoughts create negative feelings and negative actions. This in turn gives rise to more negative thoughts, creating a vicious cycle and the person becomes habituated to this pattern of thinking. CBT aims to break this cycle and helps the patient to deal with negative emotions in a better way.

Importance of 'let's talk'

Let's talk can be interpreted in two ways- (1) let's talk about depression and (2) let's talk to prevent and treat depression.

Depression or any other mental/ psychological illness is considered as a social taboo in India. So these diseases are not commonly discussed or talked about.

Patients suffering from this disorder do not easily accept it and hence do not feel the need to seek medical intervention or counselling. In this process the symptoms might get aggravated and suicidal tendency (which is the worst effect of this disease) may develop. So it is extremely essential for the patient, family and society to accept, talk, discuss and seek treatment for this disease. Also counselling with a psychiatrist should not be discouraged.

According to Dr. Shekhar Saxena, the Director of Department of Mental Health and Substance abuse at WHO - For someone living with depression, talking to a person they trust is often the first step towards treatment and recovery.^[5]

This 'talking therapy' is of utmost importance in today's life. Instead of joint family with elderly people as well as siblings/cousins of the same age, these days there is a trend of nuclear family system. Mostly both parents are working and single child is the picture of today's society. There is a decreased tendency towards outdoor games or group games. The youth is also glued to television, laptops or other electronic gadgets like mobile. In this scenario there is very less person-to-person communication. There is less sharing of thoughts or exchange of ideas. If problems are not shared or discussed, they are not solved either leading the person drift into a self-made cocoon. This is where the importance of 'let's talk' is emphasized. It may seem as a meagre thing but its importance can never be subdued. The patient should be encouraged to talk and discuss about his/her problems by elders, colleagues, seniors, doctors or near ones. The problem may not seem very difficult after discussions or some solutions may be arrived upon. The thinking pattern of the patient can be improved by this therapy.

Ayurvedic view point- Aashwasan Chikitsa

There are two types of therapies mentioned in *Ayurveda* - *Dravyabhoot* and *Adravyabhoot* therapies.^[14] *Dravyabhoot Chikitsa* includes the use of medicines from plant, animal or mineral origin. *Adravyabhoot Chikitsa* includes *Upwaas* (refraining from food), *sunlight*, *Mantra* (spiritual hymns),

Santvan (reassurance) and other psychological therapies like use of emotions like fear or happiness. *Aashwasan Chikitsa* is a type of *Adravyabhoot Chikitsa*.

Meaning of the word - *Aashwasan*

Aashwasan means to refresh or to comfort and console. It is derived from the root '*aa+shwas*'.

Treatment of *Manas Vyadhi*

The physical diseases can be cured by *Daivavyapashraya Chikitsa* and *Yuktivyapashrya Chikitsa*. For treatment of psychological diseases, *Dnyaana*, *Vidnyaan*, *Dhairya*, *Smruti*, *Samadhi* are the various factors. *Dnyaana* means spiritual knowledge. *Vidnyaana* means knowledge regarding *Ayurveda* science, which is a medical as well as spiritual science. *Dhairya* means stability or calmness of mind. *Smruti* means recollection of past experiences or knowledge. *Samadhi* means control of the mind by refraining it from various distractions. As quoted by *Aacharya Charaka* the treatment of psychological diseases is exploration of *Tri-varga (Dharma, Artha and Moksha)*, guidance of learned people and spiritual knowledge of *Aatma* etc.^[15]

Aashwasan Chikitsa mentioned in different diseases.

- *Jwara* occurred due to *Kaama* (lust), *Shoka* (grief) and *Bhaya* (fear) is cured by *Aashwasan*, obtaining the desired things, pacifying *Vayu* and contentment (happiness).^[16]
- The *Jwara* arising due to excessive *Krodha* (anger) is cured by obtaining desired things, treatment of vitiated *Pitta* and superior or good thoughts (*Sad-vaakya / Shobhan-Vachan*).^[16]
- Happiness (*Harshana*), *Aashwasan* and serving the teacher (learned people) are beneficial in *Raajyakshma*.^[17]
- *Aashwasan* should be given by near ones with the help of spiritual and happy thoughts.^[18]
- If the mind is depressed due to loss of favourite things, it is cured by regain of the lost things or similar ones, *Santvan* and *Aashwasan*.^[19]

- Happiness and *Santvan* therapy is mentioned in *Unmaada Chikitsa*.^[20]
- *Aavrit* (blocked) paths of mind (*Hridaya, Manas*) are to be treated with '*Samprabodhanam*'. It means carrying out its task without vitiation of any *Doshas*. In this case *Doshas* are *Raja* and *Tama*. *Samprabodhan* helps the heart and mind to function in a proper way.^[21]
- In psychological disorders, friends, near ones, relatives (family members) and spiritual preachers should advocate *Vidyaana, Dhairya, Smruti* and *Samadhi* in order to help the patient handle this disorder.^[22]
- *Atisaara* (Diarrhoea) due to fear or grief should be dealt with by using happiness and *Aashwasan* therapy.^[23]
- Vomiting occurring due to psychological factors are to be cured by pleasing words, *Aashwasan* and happiness therapy.^[24]

Importance of *Maanas Bhaava*

Krodha (anger), *Bhaya* (fear), *Shoka* (grief), etc. are called *Maanas Bhaava*.^[20] *Aacharya Chakrapani* has called them *Mano-abhighaatkar Bhava*. When these factors are vitiated excessively and frequently they disrupt the smooth functioning of the mind. These emotions deplet the *Satvaguna* and increase the *Raja* or/and *Tama Dosh* of mind. Such a mind contaminated by *Raja* and *Tama* is very much susceptible for psychological disorders. *Aacharya Charak* has described these *Maanas Bhava*, namely, *Lobha* (greed), *Shoka* (grief), *Bhaya* (fear), *Krodha* (excessive anger), *Maana* (pride), *Nairlajja* (shamelessness), *Irshaa* (jealousy) and *Abhidhyaa* (desire for possessions of others) as *Dharaniyavega*.^[25] It means that these urges are to be controlled or curtailed. If these urges are not controlled, they may in future lead to psychological disorders.

Responsibilities of doctor

The qualities of a *Vaidya* as described by *Aacharya Charaka* are *Maitri* (friendliness), *Karuna* (kindness),

eagerness to treat curable diseases and avoid treating those diseases which are not curable.^[26] The last quality implies that the patient should be made aware if his condition is not curable and not tricking the patient by keeping him ignorant. The most important qualities in case of *Aashwasan* therapy are *Maitri*, *Karuna* and *Priti*. The doctor should be compassionate, benevolent and humane towards patients of depression. Sometimes latent symptoms of certain psychological conditions may be revealed during discussion and may go undiagnosed if not attended vigilantly. The patient may not be aware of these symptoms till they flare up into a disease. So the doctor should be more of a counsellor and a good listener.

DISCUSSION

Obesity, Diabetes are considered as lifestyle diseases these days. Along with medications, it is very much important to modify the lifestyle of the person. Likewise in case of psychological diseases like depression, the thinking style of the patient is changed. Negative thoughts, negative beliefs change the behaviour pattern of the patient. Therefore it is mandatory to modify these thought pattern of the patient in order to break the vicious cycle and to prevent the recurrence of this disease. This can be achieved best by counselling. *Aashwasan Chikitsa* in *Ayurveda* is a type of counselling or talking therapy. *Ayurveda* has mentioned *Aashwasana Chikitsa* in physical as well as psychological diseases. The holistic approach of *Ayurveda* is highlighted in this. In today's world due to loss of communication in between relations, man has become forlorn. Feelings are not shared due to the fear of rejection, ridicule or exploit. There is an increasing demand to face and win the cut-throat competitions in all walks of life. Also due to nuclear family system, there is an absence of elders and their timely guidance. Hence the most important need of today's youth is to express their thoughts and a patient ear to listen. This is the concept of 'Let's talk'.

The aim of *Ayurveda* is prevention and cure of disease. In the same way if 'let's talk' is practised

religiously, depression and some other psychological disorders can be prevented or can be cured. *Aashwasan Chikitsa* consists of good, pleasing and benevolent thoughts, spiritual ideas, positive attitude, ethics and communication with near ones. All these things bring stability to the mind by increasing the *Satva Guna* of mind and decreasing the *Raja* and *Tama Doshas*. These *Doshas* when vitiated or aggravated deplete the *Satva Guna* giving rise to psychological disorders.

Counselling or talking therapy improves the problem solving capacity of the patient. It helps to overcome the negative beliefs and develop an optimistic attitude and confidence. If this give and take of thoughts is present in between any relation, it strengthens the relationship also. Gentle and soothing words calm the Autonomous nervous system and reduce stress, anxiety and depression.

In this process, the relatives, family, friends or doctor, who is playing the role of counsellor, should be a patient listener, compassionate, without any bias in mind and encouraging. These qualities are reflected in the values *Maitri*, *Karuna* and *Priti* as mentioned in *Charaka Samhita*.

Another significance of *Aashwasan Chikitsa* or talking therapy is identification of psychological disorders in the early stages. The mental factors or emotions like anger, fear, grief etc. are the pre-disposing factors of psychological disorders. So if a person has continuous aggravation of these factors, they should be detected and measures should be taken in order to control them at early stages so as to prevent the further development of psychological disorders.

CONCLUSION

The concept of 'Let's talk' is very useful to treat psychological as well as psychosomatic disorders. Counselling is described under the name of *Aashwasan Chikitsa* in *Ayurvedic* texts. *Aashwasan Chikitsa* is dispersedly mentioned in the texts and all the quotes have to be gathered to get a complete picture of it. The principles of *Aashwasana Chikitsa* and counselling therapy are similar. Treatment

principles advocated by *Ayurveda* includes proper knowledge of the subject, proper practical application and a good rapport with the patient. The importance of *Aashwasan Chikitsa* is more pronounced now-a-days due to lack of person-to-person communication. Excessive anger, grief, jealousy, pride, and such other emotions can be considered as common prodromal symptoms of psychological diseases. Treatment and proper counselling if done at this early stage can prove beneficial. Counselling can act as a part of preventive, curative therapy and also aids to avoid recurrence in the patients of depression.

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