



ISSN 2456-3110

Vol 8 · Issue 6

June 2023

Journal of
**Ayurveda and Integrated
Medical Sciences**

www.jaims.in

JAIMS

An International Journal for Researches in Ayurveda and Allied Sciences



Maharshi Charaka
Ayurveda

Indexed

Importance of physician in healthcare system from the perspective of *Charaka Samhita*

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ABSTRACT

According to *Ayurveda*, a healthcare system is like a table which is stood upon four factors i.e., *Bhishaka* (physician), *Dravya* (medicaments), *Upasthata* (attendant) and *Rogi* (patient), among which physician is considered to be the most principal factor among others. *Charaka Samhita* being the foremost compendium of *Ayurveda* has given much emphasis on various characteristic of an ideal physician along with his duties, functions and other essential aspects. By studying all these textual information one can draw a distinct idea about the importance and role of an ideal physician in the healthcare system as conceptualised by *Charaka Samhita*. A physician by virtue of his erudite knowledge, commanding capability and rational approach drives the entire healthcare system to its successful accomplishment. Without physician, none of the other three factors can function properly and leads to collapse. It is only the physician who is capable of bringing the other three factors, viz. the patient, the attendant and the medicament to right usage. Even if, these three factors are deficient in certain qualities, the physician can by virtue of his imagination; knowledge and concentration render them useful. The three factors (even if otherwise useful) may turn out to be completely useless in the absence of a well-qualified physician. Thus a physician holds the most important place in a healthcare system by virtue of his textual knowledge, extensive experience, noble character, skill and many other qualities.

Key words: *Bhishaka*, *Vaidya*, *Chikitsa Chatuspada*, *Kaarana*, *Charaka Samhita*

INTRODUCTION

In *Ayurveda*, the term '*Chikitsa*' has been used to denote both management of diseases and medicaments as well as to denote the healthcare system.^[1] A healthcare system is stood upon the four pillars - together known as "*Chikitsa Chatuspada*". *Chikitsa Chatuspada* is comprised of - *Bhishaka*

(physician), *Rogi* (patient), *Upasthata* (attendant) and *Dravya* (medicaments).^[2] According to various *Ayurvedic* compendiums, these four aspects are outmost essential for successful diagnosis of disease as well as its management, execution of different therapeutic procedures, application of different medicaments and prevention of diseases also. According to *Charaka Samhita*, the four aspects of healthcare system are responsible for the cure of diseases, provided they have the requisite qualities.^[3] Among the different fundamental textual resources of *Ayurveda*, *Charaka Samhita* is regarded as one of the most important resources along with the other two - *Sushruta Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridayam*. The original author of *Charaka Samhita* has been regarded as *Maharshi Agnivesha* who had written this treatise on the basis of the teachings of his preceptor *Atreya Punarvasu* - so both the personalities thought to be contemporary and lived around 1000 B.C.^[4] Later this treatise was edited by *Acharya Charaka* who lived around 300 - 200 B.C.^[5] The final shape has been given

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Submission Date: 12/04/2023 Accepted Date: 21/05/2023

Access this article online

Quick Response Code



Website: www.jaims.in

DOI: 10.21760/jaims.8.6.20

by *Acharya Drirhaval* who redacted this compendium around 4th century C.E. and revised this treatise completely according to the need of time and introduced 41 chapters into it, which was part of the original compendium but got lost with the passage of time and was unavailable at the time of him.^[6] *Charaka Samhita* being the most ancient and important compendium of *Ayurveda* has given much emphasis on the various aspects of a physician like his essential qualities, advanced qualities, duties and his role in health care system. Among the four essential aspects of a healthcare system, *Acharya Charaka* has given physician the most important place, so he has enumerated *Bhishaka* or the physician the first place among these four aspects ; then comes, in order of merit, the medicament followed by attendant and lastly the patient. The great commentator of *Charaka Samhita*, *Acharya Chakrapani Dutta* has pointed out - "apparently, a patient, being the object of treatment should have been enumerated first (among the four essential factors of healthcare system). But as a matter of fact, these four factors are enumerated here from the point of view of actions leading to the cure of diseases and in that the patient does not play such an important role. So the patient comes last in the order of importance (and the physician comes first in the order of importance as the most essential factor among these four)".^[7] *Acharya Charaka* has often referred *Chikitsa Chatuspada* (four pillars of healthcare system) as *Bhishakadi*^[8] - that is '*Bhishaka et al.*' or we can say '*Bhishaka* and others', which indicates the supremacy of *Bhishaka* among all the four pillars of healthcare system. While discussing the *Dashavidha Parikshya Bhava* (ten important topics for examination of patient) *Bhishaka* has been referred as *Kaarana* or the principal causative factor for achievement of maintenance of the equilibrium of *Dhatus*^[9] - by which maintaining the healthy state of body as well as alleviation of diseases can be achieved, both of which are considered to be the chief objectives of *Ayurveda*^[10]; that is to say, *Acharya Charaka* has considered physician as the root cause of achieving the objectives of *Ayurveda* which is also the goal of any healthcare system. Thus it can be said that, *Charaka Samhita* has considered physician as the most

important factor for successful accomplishment of any healthcare system. To evaluate the role and importance of physician in healthcare system, we have to consider various views expressed by *Acharya Charaka* regarding physician's quality, various functions, different categories etc. *Acharya Charaka* has used different terminologies like *Bhishaka*^[11], *Vaidya*^[12], *Chikitsaka*^[13], *Parikshaka*^[14] etc. referring a physician among which *Bhishaka* and *Vaidya* are most frequently used. The supreme importance of a physician in healthcare system can be assumed by one statement by *Acharya Charaka* where he has opined that, among all the factors of healthcare system, physician should be considered as foremost and supreme. Hence, the present study has been undertaken keeping the below mentioned aims and objectives.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To evaluate the different aspect of physician's character based on his qualities.
2. To evaluate the role of a physician in successful accomplishment of any healthcare system.
3. To evaluate the importance of physician in healthcare system based on his qualities and actions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present literary study has been conducted based on various textual information related with different aspect of physician available in *Charaka Samhita* mainly in *Sutrasthana*, *Vimanasthana* and *Chikitsasthana*. Different classical commentaries of *Charaka Samhita* have also been studied in multiple contexts, among which *Ayurveda Dipika* commentary of *Acharya Charkrapani Dutta & Jalpalkapataru* commentary of *Kaviraj Gangadhar Roy* should be mentioned especially. All the literary information has been verified and validated through this study.

DISCUSSION

The role of a physician in providing healthcare facilities can be discussed under the few points like:

1. Physician has been considered as the most important aspect of healthcare system. *Acharya Charaka* has opined that, though quadruped of therapeutics in all, equipped with sixteen qualities are responsible for successful accomplishment of healthcare system yet the physician, by virtue of his knowledge, administrative position and by decision making as well as prescribing capacity, occupies the most important position among them.^[15] Physician is the highest source of knowledge in any healthcare system. This knowledge about different aspect of diagnosis, management, medicaments and prevention of diseases are the most essential factor for successful accomplishment of all healthcare system. *Acharya Charaka* has categorically mentioned in different places of *Charaka Samhita* about the importance of knowledge of a physician in treatment procedure.

2. Also, the physician should also be a good administrator who is capable to run the entire healthcare system. As mentioned earlier, this healthcare system is comprised of various other factors like medicaments, attendants and patients - which need a strict organizational force to run smoothly and harmonically. So, one of the principal role of a physician is as administrator of the whole system.^[16]

3. Along with these two aforesaid qualities, *Acharya Charaka* has given emphasis on a third quality which is *Yokta*.^[17] *Yokta* is a person who is accomplished with the ability to make proper *Yukti*. *Yukti* is the rational approach in any decision making which is based on the law of causality (*Karya Karana Vada*) and has been considered as the most important method of attaining objective knowledge (known as *Pramana*) by *Acharya Charaka*. This decision making capacity of a physician can be attributed to ability of constructing *Yukti* - which can be applied in many practical aspect right from diagnosis of diseases, framing line of managements, preparing prescriptions and methods of prevention as well as eradication of any disease. So, by virtue of these three factors i.e., knowledge, administrative capacity and decision making ability the physician has been considered as the most prime factor among all the others for smooth operation of a healthcare system.

4. To make understand the importance of a physician as supreme factor in healthcare system, *Acharya Charaka* has given two classical examples like “as the vessel (related to patient), fuel (related to attendant) and fire (related to medicament) are the helping factors for the cook in the process of cooking and for the victory, a conqueror needs favourable topographical position (related with patient), army (related with attendant) and weapons (related with medicaments) ; similarly in the success of treatment the patient, attendant and medicament are helpers only to the physician. Thus, the physician plays the most prominent role in the management of diseases”.^[18]

5. Being the principal factor in healthcare system, all other factors like medicaments, attendant and patient are fully dependent on physician for their proper functioning. These three factors cannot operate independently unless until a physician commands themselves for doing so. Medicaments being an insentient object needed to be operated by any sentient being and the proper usage of the medicaments are only to be known to a physician only because of his essential qualities like medical knowledge, extensive practical experience, skill etc. Similarly, an attendant can skilfully function under the guidance of a physician and a patient cannot make his own treatment without the help from a physician. Thus it can be said that, the entire healthcare system is driven by the physician in driver’s seat along with other three factors being his support. To denote this phenomenon *Acharya Charaka* has given another beautiful example: “as the clod of earth, the wheel, the thread etc. are of no use (in making of a pitcher) without the help of the potter, so without physician, other factors do not serve the purpose”.^[19]

6. Success of a healthcare system providing eradication of diseases depends on a qualified physician in absence of whom the healthcare system may miserably collapse. As *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned: “the remaining three factors being similar, the most difficult diseases, required to be treated may soon vanish or it may quickly aggravate like the city of *Gandharvas* (an epic character) depending upon the quality of the

physician".^[20] *Acharya Chakrapani* while commenting on the supremacy of physician among the four aspects of healthcare system opined that, "it is only the physician who is capable of bringing the other three factors, viz. the patient, the attendant and the medicament to right usage. Even if, these three factors are deficient in certain qualities, the physician can by virtue of his imagination, knowledge and concentration render them useful. The three factors (even if otherwise useful) may turn out to be completely useless in the absence of a well-qualified physician".^[21]

7. As we have discussed earlier that, *Acharya Charaka* has given physician the most important place in a healthcare system, so he has given much emphasis on different qualities of a physician. *Acharya Charaka* has described different qualities of each of the factors of healthcare system i.e. physician, medicaments, attendant and patient, among them physician has the most number of qualities mentioned. This indicates how much it is crucial to be a physician having all the essential and desirable qualities for successful accomplishment of any healthcare system. As we have seen earlier, how *Acharya Charaka* has compared physician with a potter or the supreme doer without whom all the other factors cannot function properly, so he has elaborately discussed about various qualities of physician. Analysis of all these qualities is very essential to understand the true role of a physician in healthcare system as conceptualised by *Acharya Charaka*.

8. The four essential qualities of a physician as described by him are: 1. *Shrute Paryavadatwam* - excellence in medical knowledge 2. *Vahusho Drishtakarmata* - an extensive practical experience 3. *Dakshyam* - dexterity and 4. *Shoucha* - purity of mind and character.^[22] While commenting on the above qualities of a physician the great commentator of *Charaka Samhita*, *Acharya Chakrapani Dutta* opined that, "excellence in knowledge can be had by attending on preceptors and studying scriptures. Purity in a physician helps the patient by dint of its spiritual force. Reputation as infallible in prescribing medicines is also one of the qualities of a physician which is included in the four qualities mentioned above".^[23]

9. Further while referring *Bhishaka* or the physician as the *Kaarana* or the principal cause for the achievement of the maintenance of the equilibrium of *Dhatus*, *Acharya Charaka* has emphasised more on some elaborate qualities of a physician like - 1. *Paryavadatshrutata* - knowledge of medical texts in their entirety 2. *Paridrishtakarmata* - practical experience 3. *Dakshyam* - skill or dexterity 4. *Shoucha* - purity 5. *Jitahastata* - infallibility of prescriptions 6. *Upakaranavatta* - all the requisite equipment 7. *Sarvaindriyaupapannata* - possession of normal sense faculties 8. *Prakritijnanata* - knowledge of various natural manifestations and 9. *Pratipattijnata* - presence of mind.^[24] Apart from these essential qualities, *Acharya Charaka* has also mentioned several other qualities which are also crucial to make oneself a true physician. These are - 1. *Vidya* - knowledge 2. *Vitarka* - critical and rational approach 3. *Vijnan* - insight into other allied sciences 4. *Smriti* - good memory 5. *Tatparata* - promptness in duty and 6. *Kriya* - perseverance.^[25] A physician equipped with all these qualities never misses his target i.e. cure of diseases.^[26] So, by analysing all the aforesaid qualities we can say that, a true physician has to lend his duty to any healthcare system by virtue of his vast textual knowledge as well as clinical experience, along with his capacity of decision making, unbiased character and authoritative nature.

10. Another important aspect of a physician's role in a healthcare system is his role the saviour of life. Physician has been regarded as the supreme saviour of life and given the place only next to king. While describing various categories of physician, *Acharya Charaka* has described two categories namely *Pranabhisara Vaidya* and *Jivitabhisara Vaidya* - both of which refers to the same optimum qualified physician who is capable to protect life of a diseased person. According to *Sutrasthana* 29th chapter the person who possess the knowledge of 1. *Pranayatana* (ten important sit of *Prana* or life) 2. *Indriyani* (sensory organs) 3. *Vijanana* (technical knowledge of Ayurveda) 4. *Chetana* (soul) and 5. *Amaya Hetu* (causative factors of diseases) should be referred as *Pranabhisara Bhishaka*^[27] and according to *Sutrasthana* 9th chapter

the physician who is *Pravritta* (duly engaged) in following four objects like 1. *Shastra* (study of the scriptures) 2. *Sastrartha Vijnanane* (mastering the actual implication of knowledge) 3. *Karma* (the right application of therapy) and 4. *Darshana* (practical experience by observing others) should be referred as *Pranabhisara Bhishaka*.^[28] Again those who are accomplished in the *Prayoga* (administration of therapies), *Jnana* (knowledge of texts) and *Vijnana* (knowledge of therapeutics) are endowed with *Siddhisiddha* (infallible success) and can bring out *Sukha* (happiness) to the patients are often referred as *Jivitabhisara*.^[29] So, it can be said from above descriptions that, on the basis of above qualities a physician acts as the supreme saviour of life in a healthcare system.

11. If we consider the healthcare system as a pyramid structure, then it can be said that the base is formed by population based health care services, thereafter the next level is built by primary health care services, followed by secondary health care services at the next level where as apex of such pyramid is formed by tertiary health care services. The first two levels of services may be provided by the attendants, but the last two levels should be provided by physician with the help of other three factors of quadrupeds of healthcare system. To explore the role of a physician at the tertiary level, we should consider the description of court physicians as given by *Acharya Charaka*. A court physician to the king should be regarded as the most expert in the profession as he is bestowed with the responsibility to save the king and should be capable of handling all the life threatening conditions and should bring out the king from the grip of death. As a provider of the most tertiary level of healthcare, a physician should be possessed with authentic knowledge about four essential aspects of a disease like - *Hetu* (causes of disease), *Linga* (clinical manifestation of disease), *Prashamana* (alleviation of disease) and *Apunrabhava* (prevention of disease).^[30] Again a physician who is *Sarva Roga Viseshajna* (expert in knowledge of all the diseases), *Sarva Karya Viseshavit* (expert in all the therapeutic procedures) and *Sarva Bhesajna Tatwajna* (expert in knowledge of all the drugs) should be

entitled to be the provider of tertiary healthcare to highest personalities in the society".^[31]

12. At last we should remember the fact that, although *Acharya Charaka* has regarded physician as the most principal factor of healthcare system and given much emphasis of his various roles, it should be remembered that, the act of treatment is a collective effort of all the four aspects of *Chikitsa Chatuspada* rather than be a solitary capability of a physician. This aspect should be understood by the very definition of *Chikitsa* (treatment) as described by *Acharya Charaka*: "all the efforts of the four factors like physician, medicaments, attendant and the patient, possessing requisite qualities, for the revival of the equilibrium of Dhatus in the event of their equilibrium being disturbed, is known as treatment".^[32]

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda has accepted the fact that a healthcare system is stood upon the four pillars namely physician, attendant, medicaments and patient. Among these factors, *Acharya Charaka* has considered physician as the most principal aspect. Depending upon the various descriptions about different aspect of an ideal physician as given in *Charaka Samhita* we can assume the ideal role of a physician in a healthcare system as conceptualised by *Acharya Charaka*. A physician lends his services in this healthcare system by virtue of his textual knowledge, extensive experience, noble character, skill and many other qualities. Being equipped with so many such qualities, a physician acts as the supreme knower of medical knowledge, the principal doer or driver of the entire healthcare system, a decision making authority in any crucial situation, a competent administrator of the whole healthcare system under whose guidance all the other three factors functions properly, provider of healthcare services from primary level to tertiary level, a person capable of both eradication and prevention of diseases and ultimately the supreme saviour of life. Analysis of a physician's role in healthcare system as described by *Charaka Samhita* gives us much understanding about the utility of physician in today's modern era in a whole new light.

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How to cite this article: Sumana Ray Paul. Importance of physician in healthcare system from the perspective of Charaka Samhita. J Ayurveda Integr Med Sci 2023;06:119-125.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.21760/jaims.8.6.20>

Source of Support: Nil, **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.
