

Traditional Indian Systems of Medicine

R Lodha,**MD*, A Bagga,***MD*

Abstract

Introduction: A number of traditional systems of medicine exist in India of which Ayurveda is the most popular. Despite being in use for more than 3000 years, few properly designed trials have scientifically examined the clinical potential of Ayurvedic and other medications. **Methods:** We reviewed the MEDLINE database to identify clinical trials conducted using traditional Indian medicines. Single case reports were excluded. **Results:** Ayurvedic preparations have been successfully used for the treatment of bronchial asthma, ischaemic heart disease and hyperlipidaemia. Formulations containing curcumin were reported to reduce inflammation and disability in double-blind clinical trials on patients with rheumatoid arthritis. A number of products are reported to be useful in patients with acute viral hepatitis. A multicentric study by the Indian Council of Medical Research showed that a preparation from *Pterocarpus marsupium* was effective in reducing levels of blood glucose and glycosylated haemoglobin in patients with non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus. In another multicentric trial, patients with fistula-in-ano were randomised to surgery or application of medicated seton (*Ksharsootra*). Surgical treatment led to a faster cure but recurrence rates were lower with medicated seton. Administration of extract from *Bacopa monnieri*, to children with mental retardation, was reported to significantly improve short-term and long-term memory. **Conclusions:** Evidence-based studies on the efficacy and safety of traditional Indian medicines are limited. The essential ingredient in most formulations is not precisely defined. High quality studies are necessary to evaluate and compare the value of traditional Indian drugs to modern medicine.

Ann Acad Med Singapore 2000; 29:37-41

Key words: *Ayurveda, Complementary medicine, Diabetes mellitus, Mental retardation, Rheumatoid arthritis*

* Senior Resident

** Associate Professor

Department of Pediatrics

All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi, India

Address for Reprints: Dr Arvind Bagga, Department of Pediatrics, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Ansari Nagar, New Delhi 110029, India.

E-mail: arvindbagga@hotmail.com