

Key note address by Mr. Praful Patel

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In the Hindu mythology there is a story about the origin of *Amruth*, the eternal nectar. When I initially heard about PANACEA, the first thing that came into my mind is the concept of *Amruth Kumbh*. Panacea is the Greek concept of the ultimate cure for every illness. It is the most lovely dream to be cherished by every individual and society that one day the Lord of Healing will descend to humanity with the eternal remedy that can cure everything - the whole range of physical, mental, spiritual and social illness of the entire humanity. Apparently this is the most 'utopian idea' of the century, but dreams pave the way to achievements. In that aspect, I really appreciate PANACEA 2004, and the untiring efforts by Mrs. Mini Chakravarty for taking a daring step to sow the seeds of a new concept of integration of Health care systems, its providers, promoters and consumers. Each and every one of us in this universe belongs to either one of these categories and hence this is a move to bring in one string, the beads of a broken chain.

The purpose of this event is to create a common platform in the model of the democratic square, where the patients or consumers can interact freely with the practitioners from a variety of disciplines and orientations within health care to have a better understanding and make the best choices. It aims at providing the people at large with the transparent information about different health care choices and educating them about the cure for various ailments in different medical systems.

World is moving through different unanswered puzzles in health care which cannot be solved by a single system of medicine. Panacea 2004 attempts to provide an answer to the questions of wider health care choices for the consumers and how one fraternity of health care can fill the lacunae of another. The aim is to address the grave issue of availability of the right choice of healing in affordable prices to people at large. PANACEA serves as a platform for interaction between practitioners, patients and policy makers in government and

decision makers in business where each section can complement another to make the circle of health complete.

The need of the consumer is the science for the practitioner, which is to be customized by policies by the ruling sector, and implemented by the people of trade and commerce.

In a nutshell, PANACEA 2004 is the first step towards a global concept of integrated medicine that is nicknamed Polypathy to be opened to the public. Its base is on the concept of health for all. It should be a good beginning to be followed by many similar ventures that can refresh an old dream to come true in the world in the new millennium.

The world is passing through a renaissance period for Traditional Medicine Systems. With the increase of the so-called psychosomatic problems and the inability of Modern medicine to find solutions to the new diseases, the people are forced to reverse their thoughts back to the ancient health care traditions. The percentage of people diverting to these alternative solutions have distinctly increased in the past decade. This gives an added responsibility to the practitioners of these systems to standardize the systems in terms of the quality of the service provided. They have to take the additional responsibility of educating the public at large about the scopes and effects of their respective traditions. The doubts about the empirical base of many of these systems have to be cleared with solid explanations and wide propaganda is needed for this.

The growth of Traditional Chinese Medicine in the world health care arena is the best example to be followed as to how to use these boons of the past era to the present ailing humanity. A combined effort of the practitioners, patients/consumers, policy makers and also the people from the trade and commerce of these systems all have to work together to win over the neglect shown towards them.

Ayurveda, which is India's own and the oldest traditional medicine system and world's first health care system, has become the new scapegoat of the new trend of so called better regulation of traditional medicine. The last two decades showed a tremendous resurgence of Ayurveda in the world's health care market. This resulted in the mushrooming of amateur and unskilled practices and spurious sale of Ayurveda products around the world. No attempt was made by the authorities to study about various Traditional Systems of

Medicine and regulate or standardize them in a professional manner. Ayurveda has suffered the most by being classified as a Herbal medicine, whereas a large number of principal medicines cannot be called as fully herbal as per the definitions given for herbal medicines.

Current status of Traditional medicines in Europe

Due to the increasing demand for more effective regulations in the Herbal medicine sector in the European Union (EU) countries, the EU entrusted the UK Medicines Control Agency (MCA) - now called MHRA - with the responsibility of regulating the Traditional Medicine sector. A House of Lords committee on Science and Technology was asked to study about the matter of regulating the Complimentary & Alternative Medicine (CAM) practice in UK. They submitted their recommendations in March, 2001 suggesting that Ayurvedic Medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicines are to be grouped as 3a and were described as "the disciplines which purport to offer diagnostic information as well as treatment and which, in general, favour a philosophical approach and are indifferent to the scientific principles of conventional medicine." After much protest and some intense representations from the Indian Government's Ministry of Health, the UK authorities had decided to include Ayurveda in Group 1 – along with the "Big 5" CAM therapies under the umbrella of Herbal medicine.

The Group one embraces the so-called principal disciplines namely Osteopathy, Chiropractic, Acupuncture, Herbal Medicine and Homeopathy - the "Big Five". Ayurveda falls under the Herbal medicine, as per the new recommendations. By this development, more than 70% of Ayurveda medicines, which are qualified to be called as medicines, as per the law, cannot be used in UK because of the presence of non-herbal active ingredients.

Along with the above efforts of MHRA, a Herbal Medicine Regulatory Working Group was set up and Ayurveda was included in the scope of this working group. Representatives of Ayurveda were there in the Working group, but surprisingly no attempt was done to educate the MHRA about the differences between Ayurveda and Herbal Medicine.

The Working Group Report has been published and there is an intense debate going on about the education aspects of Ayurveda.

I would like to mention that during the past year some of us have come together to form an NGO in the UK called The International Ayurveda Foundation (IAF), which is an independent Non-Government and non-profit organisation, which represents a wide range of stakeholders, including the practitioners and users of the age-old traditional system of Ayurveda medicine. The main objective of IAF, based in London, is to promote the practice of Ayurveda along traditional lines to provide safe, effective and economical means of treatment to all those who wish to use this ancient art of healthy living. We are all aware that Traditional Systems of Medicine are widely used by the world population. Ayurveda is an age-old traditional system of medicine prevalent in India for nearly 5000 years. Unfortunately, under the three new European Directives, in particular the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Product Directive, there is no doubt that the non-European herbal traditions (eg. Ayurveda/Chinese/South African/South American systems of traditional medicines) are under substantial threat as a result of the European Directives. It is my earnest hope that all my friends and relatives will support these efforts, in addition to supporting many other causes I am associated with.

The European Union is currently deliberating on the new Traditional Herbal Medicine Product Directive proposed by the MHRA. This Directive will have a devastating effect on herbal products currently on the UK market and in some other European countries. The draft Directive proposes a regulatory regime that allows some herbal remedies to be licensed as medicines without proving their "efficacy" (in the way that pharmaceutical drugs have to do). They would need to demonstrate that they were safe, were manufactured to high quality standards, and that the finished product, not just the ingredients, had been on the market for 30 years (15 years of which would need to be in Europe [amendment to 10 years passed by European Parliament]). But, the practical effect of the detailed proposals now contained within the Directive is that it would remove many safe and popular products from the market.

There is intense correspondence going on between IAF and the authorities in UK and European Union countries. We have pointed out to the authorities that it will be a blatant discrimination to the four million Indo-South-Asian populations, who live in Europe, and who are used to taking various traditional medicine products, including Ayurveda medicine. We intend to fight this battle to the bitter ends. If we fail in Europe, the Ayurveda system of medicine will be doomed throughout the world. Its now or never and we have been urging everyone, including the South Asian countries to come together to make European Union understand that Ayurveda should be recognised as an independent system of medicine. It is ironic that they have already set up a special working party to accept acupuncture as a system of medicine. Our minimum demand is that a similar working party should be set up to hear a case for acceptance of Ayurveda. Even some NGOs are contemplating taking legal action and this may be possible in view of a statement that the UK's Ministry of Health has made to us in one of their letters and I feel it relevant and I should quote those 32 words for these august audience: "We fully accept that Ayurveda is a distinct discipline in its own right – we would not challenge this. We also accept that the practice of Ayurveda extends beyond the use of herbs." This, we believe, is a major breakthrough and much of our future lobby and campaign will remind the authorities of their 32 words commitment. We need all the support we can from all the interest groups throughout the world.

The main problem, as I see it, is sheer ignorance on the part of the authorities in the West and this is best illustrated by an example of the latest call by MHRA to withdraw a TCM Product by name *Fufang luhui jianoang* from the UK market. This shows their prejudiced misconceptions about the traditional medicines. Reportedly it contains "11.7% of mercury by weight and a range of other toxic heavy metals in small quantities." They have not mentioned if it is prescribed within the lethal dose range or not. This is the problem. In Ayurveda, Siddha and also Chinese Medicine, a number of mercuric compounds are being continuously used without any adverse effect for the past many centuries. Ayurveda has a separate subject dealing with mercury and other heavy metals called *Rasa Sastra*. Lakhs of practitioners are daily prescribing them, millions of patients getting benefited with these mercuric preparations. Before banning these drugs, first, the MHRA has the responsibility to clarify if there is any adverse effect that was noticed due to the mercury in the preparation. A drug, which has been in use for centuries effectively and safely should not be

unilaterally withdrawn from the market. We should protest against this tendency to write off everything beyond our knowledge as nonsense or empirical. The right approach is a toxicological analysis of the drug in prescribed dose. In Ayurveda even venom can be used as medicine if properly processed! The Siddha and Ayurveda systems will be deeply affected, if eventually all mercuric preparations are withdrawn from the world market. Our message that ultimately human body is a representation of the universe and everything and anything can be used for creation and destruction, if used with proper logic and understanding, has to sink in to the mind of these people. It is like atomic energy, which can destroy the world in one second as well as, run and maintain the world, if used properly.

Need for a harmony of various systems

Many traditional systems of medicines like Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Tibetan medicine etc. are of increasing relevance in the light of the quest for remedies for many unsolved mysteries of many new syndromes. A joint attempt by all these minority Traditional Medicine systems is the need of the time to persuade the west to listen to our plea for recognition and give the consumer the freedom of choice. Thorough standardization and GMP practices are to be followed and a massive effort is to be taken up to educate the consumers about the advantages of these age-old systems of medicines.

Platforms like this gives an excellent opportunity to propagate various medical traditions and the scopes and limitations of each system should be detailed to the public. The lacunae of some system could be filled by another. A harmonious togetherness of various systems will be tremendously beneficial to a consumer to make his choice and also help the physicians to expand their horizons of knowledge by learning other systems.

The lack of unity and co-operation among the various traditional systems has made it easy for the modern medicine sector, which is definitely organized, to over power stealing 98% of the total health fund allocations and eventually these systems were degraded and neglected as a second class medical profession with no equality in any opportunities. If the practitioners of different traditions had a single voice and a proper unified effort to fight against the discrimination shown to them, the scene would have been much better and the Indian Government also could have done something for the promotion of Traditional Medicines, there would have been

more R&D works towards standardization and more effective propaganda.

The commerce behind health

The most important gain through global recognition is the considerable increase in the export potential of the medicines for India. India uses more than 600 varieties of herbal and a number of non-herbal mineral and animal products for its drug manufacture. India with its bio-diversity is perhaps the richest nation with herbal medicine wealth. It is estimated that if properly tackled, we can cater to the herbal need of the entire world!

The global estimated turnover of exports of herbal/medicines is more than Rs. 50,000 crores. Of this India's share is very negligible only 400 cores. We have to see this in comparison with China's share of above 2000 crores!

It is estimated that the world trade in medicine plants and related products by 2050 will be us \$5 trillion and our vision should be to have at least 5% of this share in the global export of medicinal plants.

In the view of this current developments in the global arena, instead of a considerable increase in India's share it is going to come down to $\frac{1}{4}$ i.e. just Rs. 100 crores where as China is marching ahead with a 20% growth rate. If the current directive in the EU for the practice of CAM is enforced, almost 90% of the herbal medicines will require separate export license and the license to prescribe or practice it as a medicine. It will cost you a lot of money and the herbal medicine sector may not be able to afford it.

Attempts are to be made with joint strength to improvise the situation and aide propaganda should be made world over for the promotion of traditional medicines and their curative power. We have to go a long way ahead for this to ensure the purity, quality and standardized herbs preservation techniques.

Attempts should be made to document the effective use of medicaments and all systems should improve the standard of education and practice. GMP should be strictly followed and effective toxicity studies should be made and professionally documented to be presented to the world.

The first step towards this goal is the development of a harmony between the various traditional medicine sectors and their modern counter parts. Similar efforts like Panacea 2004 are to be made to bridge the gap between the "modern" and the "traditional" systems of medicines. An openhearted acceptance of each other is the only solution to provide the best to the ailing humanity. Every medical science aims at the health of every individual. Hence all of them start at the same point and end at the same point. In between what matters is the maximum benefit that is long standing, with least side effects, easily available at minimal expenses.

I hope that you all will use this opportunity to its desired effects and build up a new definition to health care in a new dimension.

I congratulate the organizers of Panacea for initiating a new trend and concept in health care. I wish this would bring a new revolution of integration between all the modern and traditional systems of medicines to fill up the lacunae of each other there by fulfilling the dream of Panacea - an eternal cure-all concept. Let this be our mission in the new millennium! Let PANACEA 2004 start a new churning in the "*Ksheerasagar*" of today's health care needs and come out with the panacea - the nectar of life – the secret of longevity to the humanity!!

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