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COVID-19: The Global impact of Ayurvedic Medicine.

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During the years 2020 and 2021, the world community faced an unprecedented pandemic of novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). Despite worldwide efforts to contain it, the pandemic continues to spread due to a lack of clinically-proven prophylaxis and therapeutic strategy. The utilization of Traditional Chinese Medicine in Wuhan to treat COVID-19 cases set the example demonstrating that traditional health care successfully contributed to treating these patients.¹

In the absence of a medicine that can contain COVID-19 therapeutically, epidemiologists globally recommend that people should focus on strengthening their immune system to combat the pandemic and recover faster. Having recognized the significance of Ayurveda's holistic approach, the world community has backed the role of Ayurvedic remedies in preventing and treating COVID-19 and hailed its scientifically tested immunity-boosting properties.²

Ayurvedic science is not just an ancient style of medicine; it is also a naturopathic healthcare system that has stood the test of time and the onslaught of contemporary research and therapeutic techniques.³

Globally, there has been a significant increase in awareness of preventive healthcare, especially during the pandemic proving the herbal medicines & nutraceuticals sector to be a strong economic partner. Though the severity of the pandemic has dropped, herbal medicines & nutraceuticals continue to be preferred.⁴

The Ayurvedic market is expanding rapidly as a result of the public being more aware of its effectiveness for overall wellness and in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. A favorable impact element on market expansion is also being driven by the items' ease of availability and rising consumer knowledge of their benefits. Additionally, increasing medical tourism is assisting in the market's expansion.⁵

Recently a research report on AYUSH Sector has been published by Forum on Indian Traditional Medicine (FITM) under Research and Information system for developing

countries (RIS), which is an autonomous policy research institute at New Delhi that, the current turnover of the Indian AYUSH industry is US\$ 18.1 billion and the market size of the Indian AYUSH industry as a whole has grown by 17 percent during 2014-2020. The total AYUSH & herbal medicines export in India has increased from US\$ 1.09 billion in 2014 to US\$ 1.54 billion in 2020, registering a robust growth rate of 5.9 percent annually.⁶

On 19th April, 2022, our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji laid the foundation stone of WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (GCTM) in Jamnagar, Gujarat in presence of Prime Minister of Mauritius Shri Pravind Kumar Jugnauth and Dr. Tedros Ghebreyesus, Director-General, World Health Organization (WHO). The Ministry of Ayush and the World Health Organization (WHO) is establishing the world's first and only Global Centre for Traditional Medicine (WHO-GCTM) in Jamnagar, Gujarat. Speaking on this occasion Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji said, "The WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine is recognition of India's contribution and potential in this field. Indian traditional medicine is a holistic science of life and not just a system of therapy. India views this relationship as a significant duty to benefit all of humanity. A significant achievement for all of SouthEast Asia is the establishment of the WHO's worldwide center for traditional medicine. This was acknowledged by the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan."⁷

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji also announced that the Government of India is likely to introduce a special Ayush visa category

for foreign nationals who want to come to India to take advantage of traditional medicine, as part of initiatives to promote medical tourism. "With this visa, it will make travel easier for accessing Ayush therapies in India." He also added that the Centre has a plethora of initiatives to encourage and promote the Ayush sector, including the establishment of a digital portal to connect medicinal plant farmers with Ayush product manufacturers.⁸

The Ministry of AYUSH has Proactive International Cooperation policies set up including those with WHO. There has been a significant and growing adoption of Ayurveda in countries like the USA, UAE, Russia, Japan and many more destinations ensuring stability internationally.⁹

As of now, Ministry of AYUSH has signed 25 Country to Country MoUs for Cooperation in the field of Traditional Medicine and Homoeopathy namely Nepal, Bangladesh, Hungary, Trinidad & Tobago, Malaysia, WHO Geneva, Mauritius, Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Myanmar, Germany (Joint declaration), Iran, Sao Tome & Principe, Equatorial Guinea, Cuba, Colombia, Japan (MoC), Bolivia, Gambia, Republic of Guinea, China, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, Suriname, Brazil and Zimbabwe. With several international universities in the following nations: Germany, United Kingdom, Canada, WHO Geneva, United States, Argentina, Israel, Brazil, Australia, Austria, Tajikistan, and Ecuador, Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) for joint study in AYUSH systems of medicine have been inked. The Ministry of AYUSH has signed 13 MoUs for setting up of AYUSH academic Chairs with

foreign institutes/ universities in countries like Mauritius, Russia, Argentina, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Latvia, Trinidad & Tobago, etc.¹⁰

At present, traditional, and complementary systems of medicines account for a major part of the healthcare being provided worldwide. However, the biggest challenge is the lack of a robust supply chain of Ayurvedic medicines. The business of Ayurvedic medicine is dependent on multiple herbs, which are often harvested from different parts of India. Companies in the trade have to set up systems down the line to the very source, with assured markets. From there, a logistics framework has to be created to ship the products to the factories and from there to the distribution hubs and stockists. International regulations are another challenge that Ayurveda formulations face as it falls under the 'food supplement segment' in the western world. This somehow restricts its further growth in the international markets.¹¹

Ayurvedic stakeholders should explore this ocean of opportunities and contribute to the further growth of Ayurvedic medicine worldwide.

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