VIEWS | OPINION

Cutting down tall claims of 'Miracle Cures'

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By **Pooja Yadav** | August 6, 2021



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The debate around the fake claims of Patanjali's tri-herbal formulation Coronil in curing COVID-19 took a new turn recently when the Delhi high court issued summons to Yoga Guru Baba Ramdev on a suit by Delhi Medical Association (DMA) stating that Ramdev's company Patanjali is propagating false information about its Coronil kit that it is a cure for the coronavirus disease. In addition, the police have also filed a First Information Report (FIR) against the Patanjali owner.

Further, the Uttarakhand unit of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) has opposed the inclusion of Coronil in the COVID-19 kit of the Uttarakhand government. The doctors' body has emphasised that Coronil is recognised as a food supplement by the Ayush Ministry and not as a drug or medicine as claimed by Ramdev. The doctors have also been raising concern over the free distribution of Coronil to COVID-19 patients by the Haryana government lately.

This reaction comes at a time when the association is at loggerheads with Ramdev over his disparaging comments on modern medicine. This is followed by the IMA serving a Rs 1,000 crore defamation notice on the Yoga Guru for his alleged remarks against allopathy and allopathic doctors.

"Besides being an internationally adorned yoga guru, he is a corporate giant of a pharmaceutical unit and has made several false acquisitions about his company products time and again to mislead the public. The controversies on coronil are well known facts to all", says Prof Dr J A Jayalal, National President, Indian Medical Association (IMA), Kanyakumari.

Adding to this controversy is the recent approval of the research publication on the benefits of coronil submitted by the Drug Discovery and Development Division of Patanjali Research Institute, in the Journal of Inflammation Research by UK-based Dove Medical Press.

"Coronil has been evaluated for its efficacy as an antiviral therapy by inhibiting viral entry into host/target cells. Coronil is formulated based on the principles of Ayurveda, which has been used to treat respiratory ailments with symptoms overlapping with those of COVID-19. It contains extracts of Withania somnifera, Tinospora cordifolia, and Ocimum sanctum. The ability

of Coronil to inhibit ACE-2 and S protein interaction was assessed through an ELISA based assay. Once it was established that Coronil could remarkably inhibit the interaction of ACE-2 and S proteins biochemically, we analysed its capacity to prohibit entry of SARS-CoV-2 S protein pseudotyped viruses into human alveolar epithelial A549 cells, expressing ACE-2. We also evaluated the effect of Coronil in ameliorating SARS-CoV-2 S protein- and pseudovirus-induced cytokine response in human alveolar epithelial cells", explains Anurag Varshney, Vice President and Head - Drug Discovery and Development, Patanjali Research Institute, Haridwar.

Tall claims

But this is not the only story revolving around fake claims of an ayurvedic medicine for treating COVID-19. Around April, Gujarat food and drug regulator issued a notice, acting upon a letter from the Ministry of Ayush, to a Rajkot-based ayurvedic drug maker, Shukla Ashar Impex for misleading claims on its product as a cure for COVID-19.

According to Deap Shukla, Managing Director, Shukla Ashar Impex, Rajkot, "Aayudh Advance is a liquid formulation comprising 21 different types of plant-based extracts. Ayurvedic scriptures report these ingredients to be effective and safe to be used for human consumption. These curative medicinal ingredients are processed using Quantum technology and Colloidal Sciences and are broken down to angstrom-sized. This makes them far more effective. After just four days of treatment with Aayudh Advance, it successfully and effectively reduced the viral load in the patients, without any reported side effects."

In response to these claims, the Ayush Ministry has pointed out grave misconduct on the part of the company regarding drug formulation related claims. Citing the Ayurvedic rule book, the Ministry said that the formulation was violating Section 33 EEB which puts a particular drug in 'Misbranded, Adulterated and Spurious Drug' category.

In this series of controversial claims came another candidate in April stating that homoeopathy medicine Aspidosperma Q 20 can be taken as a substitute when oxygen levels fall. Rubbishing this statement, the Ministry of Ayush took to Twitter soon after and clarified that social media posts making such claims are absolutely false.

It was further clarified that Aspidosperma Q20 is simply a homoeopathy remedy that is used to treat health issues associated with the respiratory system. The medicine is beneficial for those who suffer from asthma and influenza. This remedy cannot be considered as a substitute for medical oxygen which is required by those infected with the coronavirus.

Around sometime in May, thousands of people thronged Krishnapatnam village in Andhra Pradesh's Nellore district for an ayurveda treatment promising to cure COVID-19. This Krishnapatnam herbal medicine had hit the headlines when hundreds of people claimed that they have fully recovered from the disease after taking the drug.

Soon after, the government officials started conducting investigation regarding the medicine preparation by Bonigi Anandaiah, an ayurvedic practitioner from the port town of Krishnapatnam. The state government subsequently roped in experts from the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences (CCRAS) to study the composition of the medicine being distributed by Anandaiah. After the experts found that the medicine has no side effects or harmful content, they allowed the distribution in the area. However, the government has cautioned the public to not discontinue administration of other medicines for COVID-19 treatment.

Choosing Ayurveda over Allopathy?

These fake claims or controversies around ayurvedic drugs or medicines to combat COVID-19 stems from the fact that people everywhere are becoming increasingly fixated on their immune systems. As a result, companies and government officials are pushing ayurvedic products in the name of better or stronger immunity. Owing to such pushes, pharmaceutical and FMCG companies manufacturing ayurvedic products have been able to substantially increase their turnover since the last year.

For instance, many products that include the 'immunity' tag are available over the counter at allopathic pharmacies across India. In fact, some pharmacies have devoted a separate shelf for such products. While this popularity and acceptance of Ayurveda is soaring high in our country owing to the current pandemic, one does wonder about the scientific basis of the individual

ingredients present in these products. One also tends to debate whether supplements can ever replace the goodness of real food for a healthy lifestyle and strong immunity.

“If there is one question that’s popping on everyone’s mind right now is, whether it is possible to obtain all the essential nutrients from one’s diet or is there a need for health supplements? If you are eating a fresh and healthy diet consisting of whole and unprocessed foods; getting an abundant supply of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and other nutrients shouldn’t be that hard. Well, it seems things are more complicated than you imagine! Even with a perfect diet, the combination of multiple contributing factors – including our depleted soils, the storage and transportation of our food, genetic alterations, and the increased stress and nutritional demands resulting from a toxic environment – make it impossible for us to attain the necessary amount of vitamins and minerals solely from the foods we eat”, points out Mugdha Pradhan, Founder & Functional Nutritionist, iThrive, Pune.

Word of Caution

Considering the fact that it is not possible to acquire better immunity overnight and it is dependent on a person’s daily food habits, regimen, exercise routine, mental health and emotions, depending majorly on supplements or taking them in excess may not be regarded as a wise decision.

“People often want to take the easy way out, and realizing this, the industry uses emotional advertising and branding techniques to showcase their products as ‘miraculous’. The supplement industry is notoriously known to make misleading claims to fuel business due to a lack of stringent regulations. You can’t be sure that the ingredient list on a product is authentic. Food provides many bioactive compounds and dietary fiber that typically aren’t found in supplements. Besides, there’s also a placebo effect to taking supplements - people feel healthier if they believe they are doing something for their health”, says Lavleen Kaur, Co-founder & Dietician, Diet Insight, Chandigarh.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has easily overwhelmed the healthcare system of our country, a similar impact is being observed in case of the numerous ayurveda products flooding the

market. It is high time a check-point is imposed on such activities so that the manufacturers can stop exploiting the situation with their own versions of ‘immunity’ drugs.

Dr Manbeena Chawla

(manbeena.chawla@mmactiv.com)

Read online: https://nuffoodsspectrum.in/views/25/17836/cutting-down-tall-claims-of-miracle-cures.html

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