Modern medicine and yoga are rational, scientific and universal in outlook and hence are natural allies which bound to come together. Their combination has the potential to provide us with a holistic health science that will be a boon for the psychosomatic health of our masses. Improved health of the general population will result in reduction of pressure on our hospitals, which are under-staffed, over-crowded and fund-starved. Yoga and modern medicine are not exclusive, but complementary systems. Their enlightened collaboration will have a significant impact on our health care system.

Yoga involves a holistic approach to healing and well being and integrates healing with the culture, diet, environment, and tradition. Modern allopathic medicine that originated from Greco-Roman medicine and Northern European traditions is built on the science of anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry and the structure-function relationship between cells, tissues, and organs. Allopathic medicine focuses on diagnosis, treatment, and cure for acute illnesses via potent pharmaceutical drugs, surgery, radiation, and other treatment modalities.

We are today faced with numerous debilitating chronic illnesses related to aging, environment, and hedonistic lifestyle, such as cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis, and cardiovascular diseases as well as many incurable diseases such as AIDS. Modern medical advancements

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provide the rationale for the integration of various traditional healing
techniques including yoga to promote healing, health, and longevity.
It is imperative that advances in medicine include the holistic approach
of yoga to face the current challenges in health care. The antiquity
of yoga must be united with the innovations of modern medicine to
improve quality of life throughout the world.

At first glance, allopathic medicine and yoga may seem to be
totally incompatible and in some ways even antagonistic to each
other. Practitioners of either system are often found at loggerheads
with one another in typical modern one-upmanship. It would of
course be much easier to build a bridge between yoga and ayurveda
as both share many similarities of concepts such as the Trigunas,
Tridoshas, Chakras and Nadis. They also understand that a healthy
balance between body, mind and soul leads to total health. Diet and
behaviour are given importance in both systems and the ultimate
goal of both is the attainment of Moksha.

Though allopathy may not share all of these concepts with
yoga, it is to be seen that there are a great many ‘meeting points’
for the construction of a healthy bridge between them. Both allopathy
and yoga understand the need for total health and even the Word
Health Organization has recently added a new dimension to the
modern understanding of health by including spiritual health in its
definition of the “state of health”. Spiritual health is an important
element of yoga and now that even the WHO has come around to
understanding this point of view, there is hope for a true unification
of these two systems. Modern medicine has the ultimate aim and
goal of producing a state of optimum physical and mental health
thus ultimately leadings to the optimum well being of the individual.
Yoga also aims at the attainment of mental and physical well being
though the methodology does differ. While modern medicine has a
lot to offer humankind in its treatment and management of acute
illness, accidents and communicable diseases, yoga has a lot to
offer in terms of preventive, promotive and rehabilitative methods
in addition to many management methods to tackle modern illnesses.
While modern science looks outward for the cause of all ills, the
yogi searches the depth of his own self. This two way search can
lead us to many answers for the troubles that plague modern man. The *Shiva-Samhita* lists the characters of a fully qualified disciple (*Shishya*) as follows. “Endowed with great energy and enthusiasm, intelligent, heroic, learned in the scriptures, free from delusion…” Doesn’t a true modern medical scientist require these very same qualities?

**Anatomy and Physiology**

The study of anatomy and physiology is a great meeting point for modern medicine and yoga. Yoga therapists and practitioners can benefit from the intricate and detailed ‘break-down study’ of modern medicine where the body is broken down into many systems, then into many organs, many tissues and finally into billions of cells. On the other hand the yogic “holistic” view of the *Pancha Kosha* (the five sheathed existence) can help modern doctors realise that we are not just, ‘one-body’ organisms but have four more bodies that are equally if not more important. We are a manifestation of the Divine and have, not only the physical body but also an energy body, a mental body, a body of wisdom and a body of eternal bliss. An understanding of the psychic anatomy and physiology of Nadis, Chakras and Bindus when coupled with the practical understanding of the details of the physical body can inspire real knowledge of the self in all health care personnel. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has tried to correlate 37 areas of human physiology with 37 areas of intelligence or consciousness as available in Vedic literature. Some of the examples are the correlation between *Nyaya* and the thalamus as well as *Samkya* and the types of neuronal activity (Feuerstein, 1996).

In his excellent book, *The Shambala Guide to Yoga*, Dr. Georg Feuerstein (1996) says, “Long before physicists discovered that matter is energy vibrating at a certain rate, the Yogis of India had treated this body-mind as a playful manifestation of the ultimate power (*Shakti*), the dynamic aspect of reality. They realized that to discover the true self, one has to harness attention because the energy of the body-mind follows attention. A crude example of this process is the measurable increase of blood flow to our fingers and toes that occurs when we concentrate on them. Yogis are very
careful about where they place their attention, for the mind creates patterns of energy, causing habits of thought and behaviour that can be detrimental to the pursuit of genuine happiness”.

**Prevention of Disease**

Modern medicine has come to realise the importance of prevention only in recent times but the role of preventive medicine is still very limited. The Yogic lifestyle that includes the *Yama* and *Niyama* can help prevent a great many of the modern diseases like Hepatitis B and AIDS. Cleanliness that is taught through *Soucha* can help prevent and limit the spread of contagious and infectious diseases. Mental peace and right attitudes of Yoga such as *Pratipaksha Bhavanam* (taking the opposite view), *Samatvam* (equanimity of mind) and *Vairagya* (dispassionate detachment) can help prevent many of the psychosomatic ailments running wild in the modern world. If these yogic values as well as practices such as Asanas, Pranayamas, Kriyas and Dhyana are inculcated in the modern human race, we can prevent virtually all diseases that abound today. Communicable diseases as well as degenerative disorders of the body can be well prevented in true manifestations of the adage, “A stitch in time saves nine”. However the ‘will’ to do so is also of paramount importance as there is no money or fame in prevention and we don’t know what we have prevented because we have prevented it from happening (Champaneria, 2002).

To quote the eminent neurosurgeon Padma Bhushan Dr. B. Ramamurthi, (2000) “The revival of the science of yoga bades good for mankind. All the technological advances in the third millennium will not lead to the happiness of mankind as man has a severe aggressive tendency and is likely to destroy himself because of this aggression. The only way out of this mess is through the science of yoga, which transcends all religions and cults. It is a science of the mind and the body and needs to be practiced by all human beings to ensure their own future”.

**Health Promotion**

Yoga is an excellent tool of promoting health that can enrich modern medicine. The practice of Yoga leads to the efficient
functioning of the body with homeostasis through improved functioning of the psycho-neuro-endocrine and immuno system. A balanced equilibrium between the sympathetic and parasympathetic wings of the autonomic nervous system leads to a dynamic state of health. According to Ramamurthy, (2000) yoga re-orients the functional hierarchy of the entire nervous system. He has noted that yoga not only benefits the nervous system but also the cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive, endocrine and immune systems in addition to bringing about general biochemistry changes in the yoga practitioners. He has also said that the science of yoga has been India’s greatest contribution to mankind.

Management of Diseases and Disorders

Yoga doesn’t negate the use of drugs and other methods of modern medicine. Patanjali in his Avatar as Charaka didn’t shy away from the need to use medicinal herbs as well as surgical methods when necessary for the benefit of the patient. The system of Ayurveda is more in tune with the yogic views of healing in this regard but definitely the modern antibiotic treatment of infectious diseases as well as the emergency medical and trauma-management techniques of modern medicine must be understood to be life-savers in times of need. No yoga therapist in his or her right mind should try to treat an acute myocardial infarction or an unconscious accident victim by yoga alone. A symbiotic relationship between the techniques of modern medicine and yoga can help the patient more than a dogmatic refusal to see the ‘other side’. Yoga has a lot to offer in terms of psychosomatic disorders and in stress related disorders such as diabetes, asthma, irritable bowel syndrome, epilepsy, hypertension, back pain and other functional disorders. Yoga can help reduce and in some cases eliminate drug dosage and dependence in patients suffering from diabetes mellitus, hypertension, epilepsy, anxiety, bronchial asthma, constipation, dyspepsia, insomnia, arthritis, sinusitis and dermatological disorders.

Brena, (1972) has said that yoga is probably the most effective way to deal with various psychosomatic disabilities along the same, time-honored, lines of treatment that contemporary medicine has
just rediscovered and tested. Asanas are probably the best tool to disrupt any learned patterns of wrong muscular efforts. Pranayama and Pratyahara are extremely efficient techniques to divert the individual’s attention from the objects of the outer environment, to increase energy potentials and ‘interiorize’ them, to achieve control of one’s inner functioning. Moreover, in restoring human unity, the yoga discipline is always increasing awareness and understanding of ourselves, adjusting our emotions, expanding our intellect, and enabling us not only to function better in any given situation, but to perform as spiritual beings with universal values.

Yoga therapists must work in tandem with medical doctors when they are treating patients who have been on allopathic treatment. There are many instances where the patient stops medical treatment thinking that it no more necessary as they have started yoga. This leads to many catastrophes that could be easily avoided by tandem consultations with a medical specialist. Similarly, many allopaths tend to tell the patient to take up yoga or relaxation and forget to mention to the therapist what they actually want the patients to do. Most allopathic medications need to be tapered off in a progressive manner rather than being stopped suddenly. We often find this mistake in regard to corticosteroids as well as cardiac medications where sudden stoppage can be harmful. We must remember Plato’s words when he said, that the treatment of the part shouldn’t be attempted without a treatment of the entirety, meaning that the treatment of the body without treating the mind and soul would be a useless waste of time.

**Rehabilitation**

Yoga as a physical therapy has a lot to offer patients of physical and mental handicaps. Many of the practices of physiotherapy and other physical therapies have a lot in common with yoga practices. Mentally challenged individuals can benefit by an improvement in their IQ as well as in learning to relate to themselves and others better. As their physiological functions improve with yoga, the combination of yoga and physical therapies can benefit such patients as well as those with learning disabilities. Musculoskeletal problems
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Can be treated by the combination to improve function as well as range of movement, strength and endurance abilities. Balance and dexterity can also be improved by the combination therapy. The use of yoga can help those recovering from accidents and physical traumas to get back on their feet faster and with better functional ability. An example of this was Swami Gitananda Giri (1996), who managed to get back on his feet and function normally after a debilitating stay in a full body cast for more than six months. Swamiji used to say, “Modern medicine kept me alive, but yoga gave me back my life as otherwise I may have been a cripple for life”. Yoga also has a lot to offer those suffering from drug and substance abuse in assisting them to get back to a normal life. Yoga helps develop their self-control and will power and also gives them a new philosophy of living. This is vital as otherwise they will lapse into their old negative habits.

Healthy Diet

This is a place that modern medicine and yoga can help give a patient as well as normal person the proper holistic values of a proper diet. This is important for the person to know how much of each constituent of food is to be taken in the proper quantity. Yoga can help a person to learn the right attitude towards food as well as understand concepts based on the Trigunas and Tridoshas for better health. Yoga teaches us that the cause of most disease is through under (Ajjeranatvam), over (Atijeeranatvam) or wrong (Kujeeranatvam) digestion. Yoga also teaches us about the approach to food, the types of food as well as the importance of timings and moderation in diet. A combination of the modern aspects of diet with a dose of yogic thought can help us eat not only the right things but also in the right way and at the right time thus ensuing our good health and longevity.

Relaxation

Most medical doctors understand that it is important to relax in order to get better. The problem is that, though the doctor tells the patient to relax, they don’t tell them how to do so and maybe in fact they don’t know the answer themselves in the first place.
Hatha Yoga and Jnana Yoga relaxation practices help relax the body, emotions and mind. Relaxation is a key element of any yoga therapy regimen and must not be forgotten at any cost. Shavasana has been reported to help a lot in hypertensive patients and practices such as Savitri Pranayama, Chandra Pranayama, Kaya Kriya, Yoga Nidra, Anuloma Viloma Prakriyas and Marmanasthanam Kriya are also available to the person requiring this state of complete relaxation. It is important to remember that relaxation on its own is less effective than relaxation following activity.

**Coping Skills**

Yoga has a lot to offer those who unable to cope with death and dying as well as those suffering from incurable diseases. The yoga philosophy of living sees death as an inevitable aspect of life that cannot be wished away. Swami Gitananda Giri (1976), used to tell that the whole of life is, but a preparation for the moment of death, so that we can leave the body in the right way. Those who are taking care of the dying as well as those taking care of patients of incurable diseases and major disabilities are under an extreme amount of stress and yoga practice as well as its philosophy helps them gain the inner strength necessary to do their duty. Yoga can help break the vicious spiral of pain-drug dosage-pain and by doing so help reduce the drug dosage in patients suffering chronic pain. It has been reported that yoga helps improve the quality of life in patients suffering from cancer and also helps them cope better with the effects of treatment. It relaxes them and helps them sleep better. Yoga may not be able to always cure but it can surely help us to endure (Carlson, 2003).

**Expenditure**

Modern medicine is often criticized for the cost involved in its methods of treatment. Yoga offers an inexpensive method of health that can be added to the medical armory when required. Yoga only requires the patient’s own effort and really doesn’t need any paraphernalia. Of course the modern yoga industry would rather have us believe that we need tons of yoga equipment to start yoga, but they are awfully of the mark in this case. Reduction in drug
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dosage and avoidance of unnecessary surgeries in many cases can also help reduce the spiraling cost of medicare (Sri, 1997).

Aging

Aging is inevitable and yoga can help us to age gracefully. Modern medicine tries to help retard aging and help people look better by costly surgical methods that are only an external covering over the underlying aging process. Healthy diet, regular exercise, avoidance of negative habits and cultivation of the positive habits and a healthy lifestyle can help us to age with dignity. Yoga can also help our ‘silver citizens’ retain their mental ability and prevent degenerative disorders such as Parkinson’s disease, Alzheimer’s and various other dementias. Physical accidents such as falls can be minimised and many an artificial hip, knee or shoulder replacement surgery can be avoided. Swami Gitananda Giri, Yogashri Krishnamacharya, Kannaiah Yogi, Swami Suddananda Bharathi, Yogeshwarji, Yogendraji and Padma Bhushan BKS Iyengar are but a few of the Yogis who have shown us that it is possible to grow old without losing any of the physical or mental faculties of youth (Gitanada and Meenakshi, 1991).

Psychotherapy

In the field of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis we can find a lot of ancient yogic concepts being reiterated time and again. Many modern psychotherapeutic concepts such as identification, projection, and transference are similar to concepts in yoga psychology. Yoga psychology integrates diverse principles within a single body. Jung had a great interest in yoga and the eastern thought and said, “Chakras represent a real effort to give a symbolic theory of the psyche”. His ‘Centre of Personality’ concept based on dream analysis is very similar to the yogic concept of a central psychic or spiritual personality. He also correlated Chakras to the archetypes that abound in the collective unconscious. Yoga helps the psychotherapist in training self awareness, and in the self regulation of body, diet, breath, emotions, habit patterns, values, will, unconscious pressures and drives. It also helps in relating to the archetypal processes and to a transient being. It offers an integrated method rather than one
that is found in isolation in many different therapies. The theory of Kleshas is an excellent model for psychotherapy while emotional therapies of yoga include Swadyaya, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Bhajans. Development of proper psychological attitudes is inculcated via the concepts of Vairagya, Chitta Prasadanam as well as Patanjali’s advise on adopting the attitudes of Maitri, Karuna, Mudita and Upekshanam towards the happy, the suffering, the good and the evil minded persons. Yoga also has a lot to offer in terms of spiritual therapies such as Swadyaya, Satsangha, Bhajan and Yogic counseling. It is also interesting to note that both yoga and psychoanalysis share common ground in understanding that symptoms of the disease are often willed by the patients. While all psycho analysts must undergo psychoanalysis themselves, it is taught in yoga that one must first undergo a deep sadhana, before attempting to guide others on the path. However, while psychoanalysis searches the unconscious, Yoga attempts to understand and explore the super conscious (Nagarathna & Nagendra 2001).

Life Style Changes

Yoga helps patients take their health in their own hands. They learn to make an effort and change their life style for the better so that their health can improve. Life style modification is the buzzword in modern medical circles and Yoga can play a vital role in this regard. Yogic diet, Asanas, Pranayamas, Mudras, Kriyas and relaxation are an important aspect of lifestyle modification. Dr. Dean Ornish, an eminent American medical doctor who has shown that Yogic lifestyle can reverse heart disease says, “Yoga is a system of perfect tools for achieving union as well as healing.

Women’s Health

Women are the chosen ones blessed with the responsibility of the future of our human race. Healthy mothers give birth to healthy babies and a healthy start has a great future ahead. Yoga has a lot to contribute in combination with modern medicine to the health status of woman kind. Puberty and menopause become easier transitions with the help of yoga and many eminent yoginis have said that they
were not even aware of a single menopausal symptom as they went through this difficult period in a woman’s life. Similarly, our young girls can vouch for the fact that their pubertal changes and menarche has been relatively smoother than their counterparts who don’t practice yoga. The benefits of yoga in terms of family planning are also an important aspect that needs further study, as they can be an effective part of the contraceptive armory. The risk of side effects is negated and the entire control restored to the individuals themselves. The Oli Mudras as practiced in the Gitananda Yoga tradition have great potential in this regard and also the Swara Yoga theories of conception have a lot of exciting possibilities. Once conception occurs, yoga helps the young mother to be, to prepare herself physically and mentally for the upcoming childbirth. Yoga helps open the joints of the pelvis and hip as well as strengthen the abdominal muscles for childbirth. Later, simple Pranayamas and relaxation techniques help the new mother relax and enjoy the new experience of her life. Post-partum introduction of simple practices along with breathing, relaxation and a lot of crawling helps her come back to normal earlier and this can be used in all maternity hospitals along with allopathic management. Yoga practices can also help reduce the drug dosage in medical problems that often complicate a normal pregnancy such as diabetes, asthma and hypertension (Anantharaman, 1976, 1983).

REFERENCES


