

GERIATRICS AND UNANI MEDICINE – A CRITICAL REVIEW

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Medical science has witnessed enormous specialization in recent times and care of the old-aged people had come up as a specific field now. The branch of medical science dealing with the care of aged persons is called clinical gerontology or geriatrics.

Ageing is a natural process. Discoveries in medical science and improved social conditions during the last few decades have increased the life span of human beings. Essentially geriatrics is concerned with the people aged 65 years and above. The biological changes of ageing are clear but the mechanisms that mediate them are not. Various contradictory theories exist in this regard but there is a consensus that the mechanisms for ageing are multifactorial. Despite the biological controversy, from a physiologic standpoint human ageing is characterized by progressive constriction of the homeostatic reserve of every organ system. This decline referred to, as homeostenosis is gradual and progressive and is influenced by diet, environment, and personal habits as well as by genetic factors.

At present not much is known about the disabilities incident to the ageing process. However, the physiological affects are known and are shown in the Table no.1.

The hallmark of Unani system of medicine is the concept of individualized care. According to Hippocrates it is more

important to know what sort of person has a disease than to know what sort of disease a person has. The physiology of old age is described meticulously in terms of basic fundamentals like temperament, humours, faculties etc. The temperament of elderly persons is described as cold and dry and the proportion of humours in them is considered much different from those of children and young people. It is also asserted that the temperament in aged people is much easily altered by extrinsic and intrinsic influences. Consequently the homeostasis (Tabiat) of the elderly is also bound to change easily. (Table No. 2).

Keeping in view the altered physiology of the aged people, the Unani scholars have discussed the care and treatment of them separately. Regular regimental therapies like blood-letting (Fasad), Purgation (Mushil), use of strong enemas (Huqna) etc. have been contraindicated in the aged persons. While giving drugs, the proper calculation of doses is described. The other aspects of care are considered quite in detail and here only few of them are described

According to Avicenna the aged persons should have adequate sleep and the time span on bed should be more than it is legitimate for adults. Their bowels should be kept soft. A continued use of mild diuretics is recommended for them. He further asserts that body massage is very beneficial

for elderly if it is done moderately. Specific exercises are also described. For instance, vertigo a common old-age problem can be effectively curtailed by doing exercises which involve the lower half of the body avoiding such ones which involve bending and drooping of head.

Today it is well established that exercise not only benefits various physical disorders but it also improves the mood and social interaction as well as reduces insomnia and constipation in the elderly patients.

With regards to diet, Unani system recommends small amounts of foods at frequent intervals for old-aged persons. Milk is beneficial for them only if they can digest it fully and goat's milk is considered as the best for them. Vegetables and fruits especially suitable of elderly include cabbage, carrot, green-leafy, vegetables, grapes, citrus fruits, cherry, green tea etc. The use of garlic is also regarded as beneficial for them. In the light of modern research it is now known that anti-oxidants play a vital role in maintaining health during old age. Various anti-oxidants like Beta carotene, Vitamin C, Bioflavonoids, Indoles, Polyphenols and ellagic acid are present in the above recommended fruits and vegetables.

The unique Unani concept of organ-specific tonics is much relevant in elderly people than in any other age group. There is a vast list of such drugs, which are very much effective, and form an important part of geriatric treatment. Some such drugs include jawarish Jalinoos, Majoon Falasfa, Kharmira Gaozaban, Khamira Abresham, Khamira Marwarid, Majoon Azaraqi, Sharbat Faulad etc. Numerous common old-age complaints like insomnia, lethargy, constipation, and backache etc. can be effectively managed by these drugs.

It must be borne in mind that the major part of geriatrics is essentially concerned with the preventive medicine. Ageing is natural and confronting nature is never a positive step. However, various calamities associated with this age can be controlled to good extent.

To sum up, it is a well recognized fact that there is a high incidence of drug related unexpected side effects in elderly, owing to their altered physiology. Moreover multiple pathology, sensory deficit, psychiatric disorders and intercurrent drug treatment interact to both modify and mask the typical features of diseases in elderly. It is where the role of Unani system of medicine comes into play.

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TABLE NO: 1: PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS INCIDENT TO AGEING.

1.	Diffuse hair loss	2.	Reduced neuron capacity
3.	Lens opacity and presbyopia	4.	High tone deafness
5.	Reduced smell and taste	6.	Impaired balance
7.	Loss of lung compliance	8.	Reduced stroke volume
9.	Reduced GFR	10.	Systolic hypertension
11.	Postural hypotension	12.	Impaired glucose tolerance
13.	Constipation	14.	Muscle wasting
15.	Osteoporosis and Osteoarthritis	16.	Reduced No. of Sweat glands

TABLE NO.2: CAUSES OF ALTERED PHYSIOLOGY OF OLD-AGED PERSONS

1.	Less Body Heat (Hararat)
2.	Cold and dry temperament (Barid-Yaabis)
3.	Easily alterable temperament
4.	Altered homeostasis (Tabiat)
5.	Variable humoral proportion
6.	Weakened faculties (Quwa)