



FUNDAMENTALS OF MEDICAL EDUCATION - A CRITICAL STUDY BASED ON
ROGABHISHAGJITIYAM VIMANAM ADHYAYA OF CHARAKA SAMHITA

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ABSTRACT:

Introduction: In a healthcare system *Ayurveda* has accepted physician as the most important aspect among others. The utility and accomplishment of a healthcare system rests on the quality of a physician. So, to educate a physician properly is the most important aspect of successful implementation of healthcare system into the society. *Charaka Samhita*, being one of the foremost compendium of *Ayurveda* has given much emphasis on medical education. *Acharya Charaka* has categorically described different aspect of medical education in *Charaka Samhita, Vimanasthana*, 8th chapter namely *Rogabhishagjitiyam Vimanam Adhyaya*. **Aims and Objectives:** This literary study has been conducted to evaluate the basic structure of medical education as propounded by *Charaka Samhita* along with to evaluate the scope of implementation of such model of medical education in current age. **Discussions:** According to *Acharya Charaka*, the first and foremost object of a person intended to study medical science should be the proper selection of *Sastra* or the branch of medical science. Then the student should pay attention to the selection of a qualified preceptor based on several criteria as described by him. Then only the student should start his journey of learning medicine in three different levels. The primary level of medical education consist of studying under the guidance of a qualified preceptor. Then at the second level, a student should act as a preceptor to other novices. At the third and final level, a student who has established himself as a teacher, should take participation in debates or discussions with other professionals. Such debates or discussions will help to promote the power of application of knowledge and competition leading to enlightenment. **Conclusions:** Thus, the medical education system as proposed by *Acharya Charaka* is beneficial for both the students, teachers and professionals. This is a high time for us to adopt such time tested age old traditional medical education models which are rooted in the great *Vedic* tradition rather than blindly following different ambiguous western educational learning systems.

KEY WORDS: *Ayurveda, Adhyanana, Adhyapana, Tadvidya Sambhasha*

INTRODUCTION:

A proper method of education whether personal or institutional is the most important brick in building any professional course, especially in medicine. Medical education is not only comprised of textual studies, rather it also consists practical training and personality development of the professional. Among several traditional systems of medicine in the world, *Ayurveda* has given much emphasis on the importance of proper methodical medical education as well as it has categorically described the various standard methods of learning of medical science. Among the different fundamental textual resources of *Ayurveda*, *Charaka Samhita* is regarded as one of the most important resources along with the other two - *Sushruta Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridayam*. The original author of *Charaka Samhita* has been regarded as *Maharshi Agnivesha* who had written this treatise on the basis of the teachings of his preceptor *Atreya Punarvasu* - so both the personalities thought to be contemporary and lived around 1000 B.C.^[1]. Later this treatise was edited by *Acharya Charaka* who lived around 300 - 200 B.C.^[2]. The final shape has been given by *Acharya Drirhavala* who redacted this compendium around 4th century C.E. and revised this treatise completely

according to the need of time and introduced 41 chapters into it, which was part of the original compendium but got lost with the passage of time and was unavailable at the time of him^[3]. According to *Charaka Samhita*, a healthcare system is stood upon the four pillars - together known as "*Chikitsa Chatuspada*". *Chikitsa Chatuspada* is comprised of - *Bhishaka* (physician), *Rogi* (patient), *Upasthata* (attendant) and *Dravya* (medicaments)^[4]. Among the four essential aspects of a healthcare system, *Acharya Charaka* has given physician the most important place. *Acharya Chakrapani*, the foremost commentator of *Charaka Samhita*, while commenting on the supremacy of physician among the four aspects of healthcare system opined that, "it is only the physician who is capable of bringing the other three factors, viz. the patient, the attendant and the medicament to right usage. Even if, these three factors are deficient in certain qualities, the physician can by virtue of his imagination, knowledge and concentration render them useful. The three factors (even if otherwise useful) may turn out to be completely useless in the absence of a well-qualified physician"^[5]. So, a proper education for a medical student who is intended to become a physician is the most important

aspect of proper functioning of any healthcare system. To educate a physician properly, *Acharya Charaka* has described various methods of learning of medical science. In *Charaka Samhita, Vimanasthana*, 8th chapter namely *Rogabhisagjitiyam Vimanam Adhyaya*, *Acharya Charaka* has categorically described the basic aspect of medical education. He has at first given emphasis on selection of the proper medical stream, thereafter one should choose the proper preceptor or a proper institution in today's era comprising qualified preceptors. For these two aforesaid purposes, *Acharya Charaka* has discussed several points which are very relevant in today's era and should be considered carefully to choose any medical stream as well as a medical institution. Thereafter, he has described the methods of learning medical science in three different stages. The primary stage comprised of self-studying under the guidance of a qualified teacher or a preceptor. Thereafter, one should venture into the next level of learning by teaching other students. And ultimately at the end of the course of studying one should make himself accomplished of art of debating or making valid argument by taking participation in debates. This is the final stage of learning which will make a medical student an erudite scholar. The unique aspect of the medical

education as described in *Charaka Samhita* is, it has given equal emphasis on the perfection of both the teacher and students by considering a teacher as a student in advanced stage in the journey of learning. In this literary study, the author has categorically discussed the various aspects of this multistage medical education as described by *Charaka Samhita* with the view of its current utility as well as its scope of implementation in current medical educational system so that our nation can develop its own model of learning of medical science rather than bluntly following the various ambiguous western models of medical education.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

This literary study has been conducted with the following aims and objectives:

1. To evaluate the fundamental structure of medical education as proposed by *Charaka Samhita*.
2. To evaluate the scope of implantation of such model of medical education in current age.

DISCUSSIONS:

Selection of Suitable Medical Stream:

For successful accomplishment of any educational profession, the aspirant should carefully choose the desirous stream based on multiple factors. Today's experts of different educational professions give emphasis on

different parameters like fundamental approach, professional utility, need in the society etc. *Acharya Charaka*, long ago has given many advices which are most relevant in today's age. According to him, a wise man, desirous of adopting medical profession should first of all, carefully select a suitable medical text on medicine, depending upon his competence to undertake light or serious type of work, his willingness for short term or long term results, his habitat and age ^[6]. There are several such *Shastra* (in today's relevance the term '*Shastra*' can be interpreted as different medical streams like allopathy, homeopathy, *Ayurveda*, *Unani*, *Siddha* etc.) available for physicians. *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned several ideal criteria of textual resources of a medical stream which should be considered before taking any one them as their profession by the students ^[7]:

1. It should be followed by great, illustrations and wise physician.
2. It should be enriched with ideas and should be respected by reputed experts.
3. It should be conducive to the intellectual growth of disciples of all the intellectual categories (i.e. highly intelligent, moderately intelligent and less intelligent).
4. Such knowledge resources should be free from defects of repetition, transmitted by seers and have well-knit aphorisms together with commentaries thereon in proper order.
- 5.

6. Resources should have elegant ideas to convey.
6. Knowledge contents should be free from vulgar and difficult expressions.
7. Resources should convey the specific information in an orderly manner.
8. Contents should be free from contradictions.
9. Contents should be equipped with definitions of different technical terms and illustrations.

Selection of suitable Institution based on its Teaching Faculty:

After selecting a specific medical stream to pursue, the next important task is to select a specific institution by admitting in which one can get the absolute knowledge of medical science. In *Vedic* age, all types of medical education and training were conducted under the tutelage of a wise and expert teacher, from whom the students did gather the knowledge of medicine person to person. The concept of a conglomerated institution was not in practice then as this concept was later developed with the influence of *Buddhism*. Every student used to go their teacher's resident and stayed there as inmate for certain period in purpose of learning medical knowledge under his personal guidance. But in today's era, a valid medical education can only be accessed through an authorised institution which is equipped with all the necessary infrastructure, most importantly a qualified and competent teaching faculty. *Acharya*

Charaka has mentioned several criteria which should be considered before selection of a teacher under whom the student would devoted himself for learning medicine. Such criteria should be considered in today's era also in relation with the teaching faculty of an institution so that the student who has got admitted in that institution can get the proper and absolute medical education. According to *Acharya Charaka*, an ideal teacher entitled to deliver the absolute medical education to his students should have the following criteria ^[8]:

1. *Paryavadatshrutam* - an ideal teacher is he who is well grounded in scriptures.
2. *Paridrishtakarmanam* - he must have equipped with practical knowledge.
3. *Dakshyam* - skilful.
4. *Dakshinam* - whose prescriptions are infallible.
5. *Shuchi* - has purity of mind and character.
6. *Jitahastamupakaranavantam* - who possess all the necessary equipment for treatment and who is deft in practical experiences.
7. *Sarvaindriyaupapannam* - who is not deficient in respect of any of the sense organs.
8. *Prakritijna* - who is acquainted with human nature.
9. *Pratipattijnam* - who possess special insight into the sciences.
10. *Anupaskritavidya* - whose knowledge is not overshadowed by the knowledge of other scriptures.
11. *Anahamkritam, Anasuyaka, Akopanam* - who is free from vanity, envy and anger.
- 12.

13. *Kleshakshama* - who is hard working.
14. *Shishyavatsalam* - who is affectionate towards his disciples and

14. *Adhyapakam Jnapanasamartha* - who is capable of expressing his views with clarity.

An institution which is endowed with such teachers should be considered as the highest adobe for learning medical education.

Qualities of an ideal Student suitable for Learning Medical Science:

Acharya Charaka has described the following qualities of a good student fit for learning medical science ^[9]:

1. *Prashanta* (tranquillity)
2. *Arya Prakriti* (generosity)
3. *Akama Kshudra Karmana* (aversion to mean acts)
4. *Hriju Chakshu, Mukha, Nasa Vamsha* (normal condition of eyes, face and nasal ridge)
5. *Tavurakta Vishada Jihva* (thin, red and clear tongue)
6. *Avikrita Danta, Aoushta* (absence of any orbidity in teeth, lips)
7. *Dhritimantam* (perseverance)
8. *Anahamkrita* (freedom from vanity)
9. *Medhavi* (intelligent)
10. *Vitarka Smriti Sampanna* (presence of capability for reasoning and memory)
11. *Udara Sattva* (liberal minded)
12. *Tadvaidyam Kulajam Athava Tadvaidyam Vritta* (having born in a family of physician or one having the disposition of a physician)
13. *Tattvabhinivesham* (inquisitiveness for truth)
14. *Avyngam Avyapanna Indriyam* (physical

perfection and unimpaired sensory organs) 15. *Nibhritamanudvatamartha* (modesty and absence of ego) 16. *Tattvabhavakam* (ability of understanding the real meaning of medical concepts) 17. *Akopianam* (absence of anger) 18. *Avyasaninam* (absence of addictions) 19. *Shila, Shoucha, Achara, Anuraga, Dakshya* (good character, purity, conduct, love for study and enthusiasm) 20. *Abhikama Arthavigyane Karmadarshane* (uninterrupted taste for the theory and practice of the science) 21. *Alubdham Analasam* (absence of greed and laziness) 22. *Sarvabhuta Hitaishinam* (good will for all living beings) 23. *Acharya Sravanushishtipratikaramanuraktam Cha* (obedience to all the instruction of the preceptor and devotion to the preceptor).

Category of Persons who are not ideal for Medical Profession:

While commenting on the verse number 3 of this chapter, *Acharya Chakrapani Dutta*, the great commentator of *Charaka Samhita* has mentioned some of the forbidden categories of persons who should not follow the medical professions like ^[10]:

1. One who considers medical practice as something to difficult. 2. One who does not have any liking for the results of medical practice. 3. Whose habitat is not conducive to the knowledge of medicine and 4. Who is old

and such incapable of completing the study of medical science.

It is only the persons free from these defects who should aspire for medical profession and select suitable text (stream) on the science.

Methods of Learning Medical Knowledge:

Acharya Charaka has proposed three level method of learning medical science, these are: 1. *Adhyayana* (study) 2. *Adhyapana* (teaching) and 3. *Tadvidya Sambhasha* (participation in debates) ^[11].

1. Procedure of Study:

The disciple or the student should be healthy and solely devoted to study. He should get up early in the morning (*Pratah*) or in the last quarter of the night (*Pratyush*). He should then perform ablution and offer prayers to the God etc. and then should sit comfortably on an even and clean place. Thereafter, he should recite the *Sutras* (aphorisms) orally with due concentration. After proper understanding, he should repeat his recitation with a view to removing his own deficiencies and testifying to the deficiencies of others. He should continue with his practice in the noon, in the afternoon and at night without any break. This is the procedure for study ^[12].

2. Procedure for Teaching:

Acharya Charaka has considered teaching as the second step of learning. According to our great *Vedic* tradition, both the teacher and

students are considered to be the co-traveller of the same journey which lead us to pure knowledge. This thinking can be found in the *Upanishads*, where the famous *Shanti Mantra* of *Katha Upanishad* narrates the great prayer to almighty for benefit of both teacher and students throughout the journey of knowledge. So, a teacher should be considered as an advanced student who will teach the novice and by this process of teaching he will make himself more advanced in the process of learning. In today's era, this thought can be applied in two sense. The methods prescribed by *Acharya Charaka* for teaching medical science can be adopted by the teacher who are entitled to teach the medical science as well for the student also who can teach their subordinate students as advanced process of learning. *Acharya Charaka* has described detailed ritualistic procedures to commemorate the process of learning for a student ^[13]. These procedures are now a days being adopted by many colleges and educational institutions to begin the new academic sessions for their students. After completion of the ritualistic affairs a student should be given several instruction to follow during his study life by the teacher. *Acharya Charaka* has elaborately described about these instructions which should be

followed strictly by the students for successful accomplishment of their study.

Instructions about General Behaviour of the Student: ^[14]

1. The student should observe *Brahmacharya*, speak the truth, and take vegetarian diet. Resort to such food and regimens are conducive to the promotion of intellect.
2. The student should always obey the instructions of his teacher except when they are unlawful or harmful which may cause one's death or when those involve sinful comments etc.
3. The student should always devote himself to the teacher, surrender himself to the superiority of his preceptor and should behave in a manner which is pleasant and useful to his teachers.
4. The student should act without ego, with cares and affection, with undisturbed mind, with modesty, with proper vigilance, without jealousy and with obedience for teacher's instructions.
5. Acting either at teacher's instance or otherwise, the student should first of all try to collect to the best of his ability the things desired by his preceptor.
6. If a student want to achieve success in his medical profession, earth wealth as well as fame and attain heaven after death, he should

in all circumstances pay for the well-being of cows, *Brahmans* and all other living beings.

7. He should make efforts to cure the patient.
8. A student must never give way to any ill will towards your patients even at the cost of your life.
9. A student should not even think of committing adultery and should not aspire for any property belonging to others.
10. A student's appearance and apparel should make him look modest.
11. A student should not take wine, commit sins or have association with those committing sinful acts.
12. A student's speech should be pleasant, pure, righteous, blissful, excellent, truthful, useful and moderate.
13. His behaviour should be in conformity with the time and place, based on the recollections of the past experience.
14. A student should always make efforts for the upliftment of his knowledge and adoption of such methods as would give him good health.
15. A student should not treat all those who are excessively artificial in their behaviour, are wicked or are of miserable conduct and behaviour or who have not been absolved of the allegations against them or who are going to succumb to death.

16. Women in absence of their husbands and guardians and should not be treated by a student.

17. A student should not accept any joyable thing given by a woman without the permission of her husband or guardian.

18. He should enter the residence of the patient accompanied by a person who knows the place and who on his part, has obtained permission to enter there. After having entered there his speech, mind, intellect and senses should be entirely devoted to nothing except the welfare of the patient and allied matter.

19. Family customs and personal secrets of the patient should not be disclosed by a student to outsiders.

20. Even having known that the patient's span of life has come to a close, you should not disclose this to the patient himself or to the close relatives because it may cause shock to the patient or to his relatives.

21. Even though actually possessed of wisdom, a student should not exhibit it to others. Many people get very much irritated to hear such self-praise even for a saint.

3. Procedure of Debates / Professional Discussions:

In the third stage of learning process, *Acharya Charaka* has advised to get all the students to be involved in debate or professional

discussions. But before involving into debate, he should be well acquainted in scriptural studies and process of teaching. So, it can be said that, only a student who is well advanced in his journey of knowledge should get involved in such debates. Acharya Charaka has considered process of debating as the finest method of advancing one's intellect. A medical student should always engage in debate with another medical person and not with a layman. Such professional discussion indeed promotes the power of application of knowledge and competition leading to enlightenment. It manifests the clarity of knowledge, promotes the power of speech, spreads fame, eliminates doubts and brings about confirmation of what is undoubtedly understood before. During the course of discussions one comes to know many new things which were not heard by him previously. Being pleased overt the devoted disciples, the preceptor during the course of teaching elaborates some secret meanings. The participants during the course of mutual discussions enthusiastically disclose these secret meanings in brief with a view to achieving a victory over the competitor. Therefore, participation in professional debates is always applauded by the wise ^[15].

Types of Debate: Debate or professional discussions may be of two types: (a) friendly

discussions and (b) hostile discussions^[16]. Friendly discussions should be made with the people who are possessed of scientific knowledge, power of argument and counter argument, who don't get irritated, who are not jealous, who can be made to understand, who are capable of facing difficult situations and who can address in a sweet tone ^[17]. A hostile debate or discussions may be classified into two type viz. (a) *Jalpaka* (a discussions with logical arguments) and (b) *Vitanda* (a discussion with illogical arguments). There are some good and bad qualities of the participants in a discussions. Based on these qualities, the opponent in a hostile debate may belong to either of the three categories like (a) *Pravara* (superior) (b) *Pratyavara* (inferior) and (c) *Sama* (equal) ^[18]. The assembly of medical professionals in which such debates may be conducted can be of two types like (a) *Jnanavati* (enlightened ones) and (b) *Mudha* (dull ones) ^[19]. Again on the basis of different criteria, both these types of an assembly may be classified into three type viz. (a) *Suhrit Parishad* (friendly assembly) (b) *Udasin Parishad* (neutral assembly) and (c) *Pratinivishta Parishad* (prejudicial assembly) ^[20]. Acharya Charaka has described many instructions for such discussions or debate which needs a separate platform to discuss. He has laid down three golden points for

determination of the limits of a fighting debate: (a) things which should be said (b) things which should not be said and (c) the point of defeat ^[21]. These three factors are to be kept in view only in the case of a hostile debate. A friendly debate is always associated with a desire to determine the truth. *Acharya Charaka* has categorically described 44 different technical terms, known as *Vadamarga*, acquaintance with which help in the determination of the course of the course of debate among physicians ^[22].

Importance of Debate for a Medical Student:

Acharya Charaka's view regarding different aspect of a debate is very crucial even in this age where it can be applied to settle down any medico legal instance in court of law where these points can be applied to defend one's own statement and to prove it correct. Again the good old rules of debate as described in *Charaka Samhita* can also play a vital role in different medical conventions and seminars where these can be applied to solve doubts over any controversial topics and to bring out the absolute truth regarding those concerned issues. Again these process of debates can also be helpful in different methodologies of medical research.

CONCLUSIONS:

The fundamental aspects of medical education as described by *Charaka Samhita* is very

crucial to reflect the actual high status of medical education in Vedic age as well as these are also very vital for reformation of our present medical educational system also. As *Acharya Charaka* has mentioned that ^[23], it is not easy to acquire comprehensive knowledge of the Ayurveda - the science of life, therefore one should make honest efforts to be in constant touch with this science. The three level structure of our *Vedic* medical education system is a very scientific and rational approach to develop the basic knowledge, professional skill and a good moral character of a medical student which can be helpful in true sense to make him attain all of his life's goal like *Dharma* (his ideal duties), *Artha* (financial gains), *Kama* (desires) and ultimately *Moksha* (liberation). The most unique approach of such system as prescribed by *Charaka Samhita* is that, it brings both the student and teacher on the same level of learning and improvisation. By learning from a teacher a student acquires knowledge at the first stage of his educational journey, whereas by teaching other students the same person make further advancement in his educational journey and finally by debating with other professionals he can attain the optimum perfection by promoting his power of application of knowledge and competition leading to enlightenment. Therefore, it's a

high time for all of us to abandon all the blindly borrowed western model of medical education and to follow this time tested Vedic structure of medical education as prescribed in *Charaka Samhita* to make our nation self-dependant (*Atma Nirbhar Bharat*) in true sense.

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