

Pluralistic health approach seems ideal and affordable: Santosh Chowdhary

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The minister of state for health and family welfare, Mrs Santosh Chowdhary, attended WHO high-level meeting on the implementation of WHO traditional medicine strategy: 2014-2023 at Macau SAR, China on October 28, 2013.

Mrs Chowdhary shared India's perspective at the meeting and mentioned that relevance of traditional medicine today is talked about almost at every health forum because the world is facing dual spectrum of health problems, intractable lifestyle diseases and a wide gamut of geriatric health conditions. She said that effective solutions for these kinds of diseases are not found in modern medicine. So, Pluralistic health approach seems ideal and affordable. Therefore governments must adopt multi-dimensional and broad-based policies and strategies to accommodate traditional medicine in the development of health infrastructure and services, she noted.

Speaking about the previous WHO Traditional Medicine Strategy 2002-2005 the minister said that it addressed the issues of policy, safety, efficacy, quality, access and rational use of traditional, complementary and alternative medicine. Appreciating the efforts of the member states she said that the number of member states having a formal traditional medicine policy has increased from 25 in 1999 to 69 in 2012; the number of member states that have developed regulations on herbal medicines has increased from 65 in 1999 to 119 in 2012. However, India had enunciated the National Policy on Indian Systems of Medicine and Homeopathy way back in 2002 itself coincidentally when global strategy on traditional medicine was framed by WHO.

The minister highlighted that India has a pluralistic healthcare delivery system where the government provides opportunity to

every recognized medical system to develop and be practiced. Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa- Rigpa and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) are recognized systems of traditional medicine in India and they have been integrated into the national health delivery system. There is a peaceful co-existence of Allopathy with AYUSH systems. She said that there is a separate department in our Ministry of Health called Department of AYUSH which provides focused attention for the development and promotion of AYUSH systems at national and international levels.

The minister said that during the last 7 years, as many as 15,350 AYUSH facilities have been set up in Primary Health Centers, Community Health Centers and District Hospitals and 12022 AYUSH practitioners and 4905 AYUSH paramedical workers inducted into the Government healthcare services. A policy thrust has been given for functional integration of AYUSH in the initiative of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and national health programmes. She quoted that a survey conducted by National Health Systems Resource Centre (NHSRC) in the year 2008 in 18 States of the country found that AYUSH dispensaries provided services to 20 to 120 patients per facility per day and 80-100 % of the households reported use of AYUSH- based local health traditions.

Mrs Chowdhary said that India has developed a vast infrastructure of AYUSH facilities comprising of 7,20,937 Registered practitioners, 24,392 Dispensaries & 3,195 Hospitals in public sector, 508 Undergraduate Colleges with annual intake of 25,586 students, 117 centers for Post Graduate education with annual admission of 2,493 scholars and 8,785 licensed drug manufacturing units. The Government has supported resource augmentation in 38,954 hectares in forest areas for medicinal plants & support for cultivation of medicinal plants in 1,85,719 hectares of land has been provided to the farmers till September 2013, she added.

Speaking about the National AYUSH Mission the Minister said that it aims to provide complete functional integration in the Essential Health Package and help in combating under-nutrition in children, reduction of anemia in women and prevention and reduction of burden of Communicable and Non-Communicable diseases (including mental illnesses).

Mrs Chowdhary emphasized that India has developed Traditional Knowledge Digital Library (TKDL) for protecting traditional knowledge against misappropriation and wrong patents. Under TKDL, digitization of the knowledge available in public domain in the form of existing literature related to Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Yoga, is being done in patent compatible format in five International languages English, German, French, Japanese and Spanish. Till September, 2013 a total of 2, 90,998 formulations have been transcribed, she said.

The minister noted that foreign nationals have been encouraged to come to India for studying Ayurveda. Quality of education, practice, research and drug manufacturing have been regulated and enforced with similar provisions which are stipulated for modern medicine.

Smt. Chowdhary hoped that the implementation of the new strategy will be the turning point for the countries in mitigating health challenges with systematic utilization of traditional medicine and it would lead us to new era of Universal Health Coverage.

Present at the occasion were Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General, World Health Organization, Mr Fernando Chiu, CEO Macau, Health Ministers of different Countries, officers and experts of WHO and various other dignitaries.