

EDITORIAL

Why do we need Lifestyle Medicine?

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"While the search for the magic bullets continues, other studies are revealing that the environment in which the individuals' lives and his manner of living are of great importance in determining his susceptibility to the diseases of modern times."

Rene Dubos

(Mirage of Health-Utopias, Progress, and Biological change, 1959)(1)

This quote by one of the greatest microbiologist of 20th century is even more relevant today where Non-communicable diseases have taken the center stage in the world as well as in India. The impact of NCD's in India is quite alarming. NCD's account for 60%of all deaths and 53% of disease burden, over 20% of the population in India has at least one chronic disease, NCD's are estimated to cost India 62 million during the period 2012 – 2030.(2) Most of these NCD's are related to some common risk factors like lack of physical activity, tobacco use, alcohol abuse, unhealthy diet, stressful lifestyle, lack of adequate sleep. That is the reason NCD's are now being called as lifestyle diseases and interestingly, most of the NCD's are preventable (and some of the important ones also reversible in early stages) through lifestyle approaches also being called as '**Lifestyle Medicine**'.

According to European Lifestyle Medicine Organization- "*Lifestyle medicine is a branch of evidence-based-medicine in which comprehensive lifestyle changes (including nutrition, physical activity, stress management, social support and environmental exposure) are used to prevent, treat and reverse the progression of chronic diseases by addressing their underlying causes. Lifestyle medicine interventions include health risk assessment screening, health behavior change counseling and clinical application of lifestyle modifications.*"(3)

The important question is- why do we need a new approach to prevent and treat NCD's when when we have so much knowledge and expertise in hi-tech modern medicine, having so many drugs and other interventions?

The answer is that in spite of the best of hospitals and doctors the disease burden of NCD's is increasing even in USA- which is supposed to be the leader in modern medicine. A recent study published in the *Journals of Gerontology* on 1st June, 2022, concludes that more recent cohorts of 51years and older had greater burden of MCC (multiple chronic conditions) at earlier ages than those born to prior generations. This hints of diminishing health in aging populations. (4)

Moreover, the exponential rise in NCD's in developing countries like India is well documented fact now. In spite of the growing number of hospitals and health facilities, both in government as well as private sector, the rates of common cancers, Coronary Heart Disease, Diabetes type 2, Hypertension, all are showing a rising trend, not only in urban but also rural areas of the country. Therefore we need something more than just prescribing drugs or performing surgeries or even the public health practices based only on 'biomedical approach'.

One of the foremost proponents of Lifestyle Medicine, Dr. Mark Hymen in his international best seller- '**THE BLOOD SUGAR SOLUTION**' has expressed his disappointment with conventional approach in preventing and managing NCD's in following words.....

"Treating diabetes with medication or insulin is like mopping up the floor while the faucet continuous to overflow."

"As physicians, we are trained to offer medication and surgery to solve diabetes (and disease in general) where the real causes include poor quality diet , nutritional

deficiencies, hormonal imbalances, allergies, microbes, digestion imbalances, toxins, cellular energy problems and stress".(5)

"We think that treating risk factors such as high blood sugar, cholesterol and blood pressure with medications will help but we don't learn how to identify and treat the real cause of disease."(5)

Infect, the ACCORD study which was published in a leading medical journal NEJM in 2008 included 10,000 patients having diabetes with either rigorous therapy or standard therapy to control blood sugar levels. They were followed up for the risk of developing heart attack, stroke, and death. Surprisingly The National health Institute had to stop the study because aggressive control of blood sugar caused more deaths and heart attacks.(6)

Another well known author of an international best seller **"HOW NOT TO DIE"**- Michael Greger, M.D has given the following figures about the impact simple lifestyle modifications can have on prevention of deaths globally. This data is based on the **Global Burden of Disease Study** –*"about 299, 521 lives can be saved if people around the world cut back on fizzy (carbonated) drinks; processed meat is blamed for death of more than 800,000 people every year; eating more whole grains could potentially save 1.2 million lives a year; more vegetables 1.8 million lives; nuts and seeds 2.5 million lives; worldwide if human beings consumed more fruits 4.9 million lives may be saved".(7)*

In the same book Michael Greger makes another bold statement–*"High blood pressure, then appears to be a choice you can continue eating the artery bursting western diet or you can choose to take off pressure. The truth is that eliminating humanity's primary risk factor for death may be simple. No drugs, no scalpels. Just forks".(7)*

Dr Asseem Malhotra- A renowned cardiologist along with Donel O' Neill, in his acclaimed book **'The Pioppi Diet – a 21 day lifestyle plan'** writes following words about our dietary choice – *"The first is our collective and individual failure to recognizing that what we put in our mouth every time we eat can either confer wellness or contribute to a ticking bomb of chronic diseases and early death..... poor diet now contributes more to diseases globally than does lack of physical activity, smoking and alcohol combined.(8)*

When we talk of Lifestyle Medicine it not just our eating habits, our physical activity, and our sleeping habits it also includes our thinking habit. There are several well written books having hundreds of published references which strongly suggest that our feelings and emotions especially those of despair, fear, hopelessness, anger etc. greatly impact our health and wellbeing. (9,10, 11, 12,13.)

Sandeep Jauhar is a director of the Heart Failure Program at long Island Jewish Medical Center. In his ground breaking book **"HEART - A HISTORY"** he writes – *"but there are almost certainly cardiovascular risk factors that Framingham investigators did not identify. Some of these factors are likely in the "psychosocial" domain that*

Framingham investigators decided to ignore when the study was taken over by the NHI in the early 1950's.(14)

"However, this narrow focus on biological mechanisms has hurt patients. We have overused stents and pacemakers. We have moved away from the emotional heart to a narrow focus on the biomechanical pump."(14)

Even the world's biggest killer..... Coronary heart disease seems to be related to our psycho-social environment therefore practices like meditation, yoga, social connectivity assume a great significance in our overall well- being.

Dr Dean Ornish is the President and director of Preventive Medicine Research Institute in Sausalito, California. He became internationally known when he first published a study proving that lifestyle intervention may lead to regression of coronary atherosclerosis in the well known journal JAMA in 1998.(15)

Based on his research he developed one of the most popular programme for reversing heart disease which is one of the few lifestyle medicine based preventive programmes funded by health insurance companies across United States. He has also written a book **'Dr. DEAN ORNISH'S program for Reversing Heart Disease'** which is a New York Times best seller. He writes in his book..... *"I am coming to believe that our emotional and spiritual health are exceptionally important to the health of our hearts. I'll share the latest scientific research in this exciting new field and explain how my own background helped to convince me of its value."(16).*

He (Dr. Dean Ornish) has not stopped at just reversing the coronary heart disease, he now claims in his latest book, based on scientific evidence that almost all chronic diseases can be reversed by simple lifestyle changes. The name of his latest book is **UNDO IT!- How simple lifestyle changes can reverse most chronic diseases**. His four major lifestyle changes mentioned in this book are: **A Whole- food- plant-based diet; Moderate exercise; Stress management; Love, social support, and Intimacy.**(17)

In this very well written book Dean Ornish makes a interesting observation about the prevalent medical practice – *"Most physicians spend only about ten minutes with a patient at an office visit. This is often frustrating for both doctors and patients, since there is insufficient time to talk about what matters most: what's going on in their lives with respect to their diet, exercise, sources of stress, their marriage, their kids, their work, their friends, their finances, their home, and their spiritual life".*

One of the biggest proponent of mind body medicine and spiritual aspect of healing- **Dr.Larry Dossey M.D.** the world famous author of many international best sellers including **'HEALING WORDS', 'SPACE TIME AND MEDICINE', 'RECOVERING THE SOUL'** has this to say in his landmark book **MEANING & MEDICINE- A doctor's tales of breakthrough and healing** –*"Without meaning then, we have no intent in our life – no activity or energy, no goal to pursue. With no story to tell, no purpose, and no*

activity, we are as good as dead. This is not hyperbole. In fact, as many of the following stories show, physical death is literally the outcome of the various “no-meaning syndromes”.(9)

Padma Vibhushan awardee **Professor B.M. Hegde**, the world famous cardiologist and ex vice-chancellor of Manipal University has been a strong advocate of holistic health approach and has written several articles in leading journals and books supporting his views. In his one of the best sellers **‘WHAT DOCTOR’S DON’T GET TO STUDY IN MEDICAL SCHOOL’** shares his wisdom in following words *“The medical world is learning the hard way the need to respect this capacity of the body and not to interfere too much too soon with modern gadgets and powerful drugs, hurting the native wisdom of the body and it’s in-built protective mechanisms”*. (18)

To conclude it can be said that Community Medicine should take this opportunity to learn, to teach, and to practice **Lifestyle Medicine** because the subject Community Medicine is most suitable for this paradigm shift in preventing and reversing lifestyle diseases.

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