Science of Exercise: Ancient Indian Origin

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Correspondences

Sir,

Samiran Mondal has given an exhaustive exposition of Charak’s description about importance of exercise in health in his review paper published in JAPI 2013;61:560-62. However, the enormous contribution of Sushruta regarding advantages of exercise in prevention of type 2 diabetes and obesity has only been limited to a passing remark.1,2 Incidentally Sushruta, though a skilful surgeon, was the first to describe the entity of hritshool (present day angina).2 Sushruta not only gave a vivid description of diabetes and its two types, but also described the causes namely, overeating and lack of physical exercise which is responsible for diabetes. He even went to the extent that diabetes can be prevented by exercise and controlled diet.3 He is thus considered to be the first ancient clinician to have laid emphasis on exercise and diet for prevention of diabetes mellitus, obesity, and angina.2

References


Reply from Author

Samiran Mondal*

Sir,

The article ‘Science of Exercise: Ancient Indian Origin, JAPI 2013;61:8:560-62, is a part of my research project. Sushruta has already been recognised to the history of Exercise Physiology.1 The aim of my article was to acquaint the exercise science community with specially Charaka’s contribution in this field. Sushruta a disciple of Dhanwantari was a physician who taught surgery and medicine at the University of Benaras.2 A critical analysis of the ancient Bower Manuscript by Hoerule demonstrated Sushruta was historical figure during 600 BC.3 The lowest limit of Sushruta’s death is fixed as the sixth and seventh century BC.4 Therefore 600 BC has been selected for the era of Sushruta.1 On the other hand, ‘Atreya Samhita’ was considered as the world’s oldest record of medical practice.5,6 The term Atreya means the son or the disciple or the descendent of Atri. The sage Atri is quoted often in the Rigveda (the oldest literature in the world7) and Atharvaveda as the seer of vedic hymns. Agnivesa on the advice and guidance of Atreya, his preceptor compiled Ayurveda (Agnivesa Samhita) which was subsequently redacted by ‘Charaka’. The original text of Agnivesa Samhita was composed perhaps some time around 1000 BC. This is further substantiated by the composition which...
resembles that of ‘Satapatha Brahamana’ written almost at the same time. The original work of Agnivesa is not available now. Neither the text nor any external evidence provides any precise data about the time of Charaka. Absence of Buddhistic influence, maintenance of Brahminic style and nature of the exposition are indication of the pre-Buddhistic origin of Charaka’s work.8

From Atreya to Agnivesa and Agnivesa to Charaka the knowledge of Ayurveda spreaded for the mankind. So, the application of exercise for positive health and therapy found in ‘Charaka Samhita’ was the oldest living evidence in the world.

References