

ALTERNATIVE HEALTH CARE

YOGA ○ AYURVEDA ○ PANCHAKARMA ○ UNANI

Medical care of the survivors continues to be based upon pharmaceuticals that provide temporary if any relief of individual symptoms. Many of these drugs can be toxic to the patients. Overuse of pharmaceuticals has, actually, gradually given rise to a host of unnecessary health complications in Bhopal's gas and contamination affected patients. Very often chronically ill survivors have iatrogenic -- doctor and drug induced -- damages compounding the injuries caused by gas exposure and water contamination.

Indigenous systems of medicine, on the other hand, have been recognised as effective alternative therapies both by the voluntary organisations and the survivors themselves. Yoga therapy, for instance, has been found to be an effective means to provide sustained relief to persons suffering from chronic breathlessness and other consequences of toxic gas exposure. But in the official gas relief medical rehabilitation budget for 1995 to 2000, only 0.61 percent was allocated for indigenous medical care. The amount allocated today is even less than that.



The Problem

The large scale misuse of medicines compounds the injuries caused by the gas. The drugs most often abused are antibiotics, steroids, and psychotropic drugs like tranquilizers. The International Medical Commission has found that many of the specific pharmaceuticals most frequently prescribed to gas and contamination affected patients can be very toxic and harmful.

Corticosteroids, for instance, were being used to treat rashes and breathlessness. Corticosteroids can suppress the immune system, leaving patients vulnerable to new infections or relapse of old ones, especially tuberculosis, which is extremely prevalent in gas affected communities. Other side effects include peptic ulcers and gastritis, cataracts, adrenal suppression, and bone demineralization. Analgin, a drug banned in many countries for its association with fatal agranulocytosis, has been one of the more frequently prescribed analgesics.

Sambhavna Trust Clinic conducted a study on the distribution of medicines in the gas affected area. The study shows that irrational formulations are the drugs most often sold, that one out of every three prescriptions written by doctors are irrational.

<i>Harmful</i>	<i>Useless</i>	<i>Both Harmful & Useless</i>	<i>Neither harmful nor useless</i>
26.3%	48.5%	7.6%	17.6%

Of instances when drugs were properly selected, the correct dosage was prescribed only 55% of the time. In the other 45% of cases, an improper amount of the drug was prescribed.

What makes this even more tragic is how much money is spent on by poor survivors on these pharmaceuticals. The Bhopal Group for Information and Action found that years after the disaster, 66% of a survey sample spent more than 20% of their income on medicines and 25% spent more than half their income on medicines. Sambhavna also points out that multinational companies have the major share in the drug market in gas-affected Bhopal.

Yoga Works

Combinations of yogic asanas (postures), shodhan kriya (cleansing actions), pranayama (breathing exercises), and dhyana (meditation) are known to provide sustained relief in many of the symptoms presented by the survivors, including breathlessness, chronic cold, back ache, joint pains, constipation, anxiety, and insomnia. Yoga has the potential of reducing the use of pharmaceuticals for such conditions, if not replacing them altogether. At the Sambhavna Trust Clinic, yoga therapy is offered to gas survivors as a means of providing sustained relief from breathlessness without the use of drugs.

One reason the government cites for rejecting yoga as treatment and therapy for gas and contamination affected Bhopal is that yoga is Hindu and would be perceived as "Hindu imposition" by Muslims, who constitute roughly half of the affected population. 72% of people in yoga treatment at Sambhavna, however, are Muslim.



Sambhavna Trust carried out research on the treatment of respiratory diseases through yoga and the results were presented at XVI World Congress of Asthma in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1999. In Sambhavna's study, recording several measures of lung function before and after yoga practice revealed marked and sustained relief of symptoms among persons following yoga instructions for as little as 15 days. During a six-month yoga program, participants in the study were evaluated at frequent intervals for such parameters as respiratory rate prior to and after standard exercise, pulse rate prior to and after standard exercise. The difference in respiratory rate and pulse rate before and after exercise was significant. Measurements of all but one parameter showed an increase in lung function. This report was sent to the government for comments asking why the government hospitals could not start yoga, but it was essentially ignored.

(Gupta, A., Durgavanshi, S. and Eckerman, I. "Effects of yoga practices for respiratory disorders related to the Union Carbide Gas Disaster in 1984." XVI World Congress of Asthma, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 17-20 October, 1999.)

What is Needed

The results at the Sambhavna Trust Clinic over the last ten years show that it is possible to develop safe, simple, inexpensive, and effective therapies specific to exposure-induced health problems. The proposed National Commission on Bhopal must explore possibilities and allocate funds for alternative therapies like Yoga, Ayurveda, Unani, and Panchakarma.

Who Must Provide It

Providing health care for the exposed individuals in Bhopal is the responsibility of the central government and its Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers. In 1990 when the Indian Supreme court revisited the 1989 civil settlement agreement with the Union Carbide Corporation over liabilities arising from the Bhopal gas disaster, it stated that the government would fund and manage any further medical needs arising out of the gas disaster.

WE DEMAND that the central government set up a National Commission on Bhopal with the necessary authority and funds to provide indigenous health care such as Yoga instruction, Ayurveda, Panchakarma, and Unani to members of communities poisoned by Union Carbide / Dow Chemical. The commission must have active participation of the community and representatives of survivor's organizations.

**This padyatra is our march for justice and dignity. We shall struggle until our last breath.
21 years is enough!**

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