

INCLUDE AYURVEDA – PETITION ADDRESSED TO THE HON. DEFENCE MINISTER OF INDIA TO INCLUDE AYURVEDA UNDER INDIAN ARMED FORCES’ MEDICAL REIMBURSEMENT RULES

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Sir,

Stakeholders in the Ayurveda sector who are readers of your prestigious journal may not be aware that the Indian Armed Forces presently does not cover Ayurveda medical care under its medical reimbursement scheme for serving and retired armed forces personnel, and their families. This has serious implications for the people who seek/need alternate healthcare options for some diseases/conditions. This also has serious implications for Ayurveda as a credible medical system in the country of its origin and primary practice. Needless to say, it is a sad day when a most powerful living medical tradition that serves the needs of millions of people is disregarded in the country of its origin and practice.

PV Manesh, NSG Commando, saved 40 lives on 26/11 in Mumbai in an act of selfless service, but a grenade blast left the right side of his body paralysed. Manesh, a Shaurya Chakra awardee, regained normal speech and certain degree of independent mobility only after undergoing classical Ayurveda therapies. Following media reports in 2011, a public interest litigation was filed in the Delhi High

Court based on which a division bench directed the Ministry of Defence, Government of India, to frame guidelines relating to medical treatment and reimbursement within three months, in consultation with the heads of all three arms of the defence forces. However, Manesh is now compelled to pay his own medical bills since the Director General of Armed Forces Medical Services (DG_AFMS) has stated by formal affidavit before the Hon. Delhi High Court his inability to include Ayurveda (Indian Systems of Medicine) for the purpose of reimbursement of medical expenses to Indian Armed Forces personnel.

Rather than consider the Delhi High Court's directive as a welcome opportunity to seriously consider how Ayurveda can be co-opted in the overall scheme of medical care provision for the armed forces of India the DG-AFMS has blatantly ignored Ayurveda medical science and its time tested therapeutic capabilities as well as potential health benefits to the primary stakeholder - the Indian armed forces personnel and their families. It is beyond reason to imagine that serving and retired defense personnel and their families do not require the excellent treatments available

for both secondary and tertiary prevention of various chronic diseases, and in particular the proven ability of Ayurveda in the area of rehabilitation of various kinds (neurological, musculoskeletal, wound healing, psychiatric, and other). The reasons quoted by the DG-AFMS in his submission could have been easily addressed in a time bound fashion if there was indeed an intent and willingness to do so.

The author has initiated on the 11th June, 2012 an online petition campaign at the following web URL: <http://ayurvedaid.com/petition> or at <http://chn.ge/ayurvedaindia> addressed to relevant departments and functionaries of the Government of India to take cognizance and initiate time bound action to bring changes in the existing reimbursement rules applicable to the Indian Armed Forces. The 'INCLUDE AYURVEDA' petition is perhaps the first instance of an online petition campaign in the history of the Ayurveda sector.

OBJECTIVE OF 'INCLUDE AYURVEDA' PETITION

The "INCLUDE AYURVEDA" petition demands the intervention of the Hon. Defence Minister, Government of India, and the Chiefs of Staff of the Army, Navy and Air force to constitute a special committee / task-force made up of relevant stakeholders from within the armed forces as well as from the Ayurveda medical services sector to formulate clear guidelines by 31st December, 2012 for inclusion of Ayurveda under authorised medical reimbursement scheme for (serving and retired) members of the Indian armed forces and implement the same by 31st March.

ISSUES AT STAKE

There are two points of principle at stake in the "INCLUDE AYURVEDA" campaign:

- i. Complementing modern medicine with Ayurveda to comprehensively serve the

healthcare needs of (serving and retired) Indian defence personnel and their families, and

- ii. Zero tolerance to negative bias towards Ayurveda medical science in the country of its origin and primary practice

AYURVEDA - RESURGENCE AS A MAINSTREAM MEDICAL SYSTEM

Ayurveda is approved by CGHS, SGHS and by many of the medical insurance companies. RSBY, the flagship GoI scheme to cover BPL (Below Poverty Line) citizens of the country under a comprehensive medical insurance scheme is soon expected to cover Ayurveda too. NABH (National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers) accreditation, as applicable for Allopathic hospitals, is now possible for Ayurveda hospitals too; in fact there are several Ayurveda hospitals that are already NABH accredited in different parts of the country. Increasingly, people are realising the benefits of root-cause diagnosis and management provided by Ayurveda with virtually no side effects. There are over 300,000 professionally qualified Ayurveda doctors in the country and over 14,000 fresh graduates and post-graduates passing out each year. The Ayurveda sector is a mature one spanning public and private endeavour. Ayurveda is India's national medical science. Post-independence it had languished but it is now resurgently claiming its position as a proven medical science capable of meeting the highest clinical standards and process-quality-documentation standards expected from a modern healthcare system.

WHAT DOES THE 'INCLUDE AYURVEDA' PETITION SEEK TO REDRESS?

This petition is realistic in its expectations. We do not say that Ayurveda can be the treatment of choice for all diseases - it depends on the roga (disease) and the roga-rogiawastha

(disease-patient status). We can understand that the defence establishment has very complex and sensitive issues to address and how Ayurveda medical care is provided for has to be carefully planned taking into account these multiple factors. We respect that genuine concerns and constraints may exist- some real, some based on ignorance of what Ayurveda is capable of, and perhaps also because of inertia (resistance to change).

We only wish that guidelines be framed in a judicious and time-bound manner so that AYURVEDA PLAYS AN APPROPRIATE AND VALID role in non-emergency medical conditions where it has time tested remedies and we are given an opportunity to serve our brothers and sisters in the Indian armed forces and their families.

The Author urges each and every Indian to sign the 'INCLUDE AYURVEDA' petition.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author sincerely thanks stakeholders from the Ayurveda sector including Ayurveda students, physicians, academicians, researchers, employees of Ayurveda sector organisations in the private & government sector, serving and retired members of the armed forces, and most importantly the general public who have strongly participated in this campaign, a total of over 7,500 'Voices for Ayurveda' who have already signed the petition within 15 days of launch of the petition, which is a significant milestone in the process of transforming Ayurveda into a mainstream system of medicine in the land of its origin and primary practice.