

# Homeopath doctors double in two decades

Kounteya Sinha, TNN | Sep 1, 2012, 03.46AM IST

NEW DELHI: Western countries may find homeopathy "unscientific" and for which dozens of systematic reviews have "failed to produce convincing evidence of effectiveness".

But India continues to see a massive jump in the demand for the 250-year-old system of medicine.

India's registered homeopathic practitioners have more than doubled in two decades — increased from 1.05 lakh in 1980 to 2.46 lakh in 2010.

Also, the number of homeopathic hospitals/dispensaries has also increased four fold — from 1,686 in 1980 to about 7,000 in 2010.

Union health minister Ghulam Nabi Azad said on Friday that a recent study called "usage and acceptability of Indians systems of medicine" conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) found that the annual average outdoor patient attendance was higher in homeopathy in comparison to ayurveda, unani and siddha.

Azad said, "The demand for homeopathic treatment has increased in the country. Under a centrally sponsored scheme, a one time assistance upto Rs 10 crores is being provided to the states on 50:50 matching share basis for opening of new homeopathic institutions in states not having such institutes."

Director general of Central Council for Research in homeopathy Dr R K Manchanda said, "Till now, the benefits of homeopathy were established through observational studies. Now we are validating homeopathy's benefits through randomized controlled trials and fundamental research. Homeopathy is especially beneficial for arthritis, skin and respiratory diseases, gastric problems like irritable bowel syndrome and allergies. Homeopathy costs one fifth of an allopathic consultation in any government set up."

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), homeopathy is the second largest system of medicine in the world. WHO says the annual sale of homeopathic drugs accounts to Rs 8,400 crore globally. By 2017, the market will be Rs 52,000 crore.

WHO adds that homeopathy is practiced in 66 countries and the treatment is individualized. It seeks to stimulate the body's defence mechanisms to prevent or treat illness. A recent industry study had predicted that Indian homeopathy treatment market is likely to grow 30% annually, and pegged it around Rs 4,600 crore.

In 2009-10, the number of people who used homeopathy throughout the country was estimated at 10-12 crore.

This number is likely to exceed about 16 crore by the end of next year.

In 2010, the domestic homeopathy market size was about Rs 2,758 crore, the study by Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) had said.

It added that India has over 5 lakh registered homeopaths with approximately 20,000 more being added every year.

Globally, the homeopathy market is estimated at Rs 26,300 crore with France being the largest contributor.

Union health ministry officials said over 100 million Indians, depend solely on homeopathy.

Even in the UK, where doctors have raised serious doubts on homeopathy, the market was estimated to be worth 38 million pounds in 2007 and is expected to rise to 46 million pounds in 2012.

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