



GERIATRIC CARE REIMAGINED: UNANI HERITAGE AND MODERN MEDICAL PRACTICES IN HARMONY

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ABSTRACT

Population ageing is a global phenomenon accompanied by a rising burden of chronic diseases, functional decline, and mental health problems among older adults. Conventional modern medicine has significantly improved life expectancy; however, management of geriatric health often remains fragmented and disease-oriented. Traditional systems such as Unani medicine emphasize holistic, preventive, and individualized care, which may complement contemporary geriatric practices. This review explores concepts of ageing, common geriatric health problems, and management strategies from both Unani and modern medical perspectives, highlighting the potential role of integrative approaches in improving health outcomes and quality of life among the elderly. Evidence from published literature suggests that combining lifestyle modification, preventive care, and rational therapeutic interventions from both systems may offer a comprehensive framework for geriatric care, particularly in community and public health settings.

KEYWORDS: Geriatric care; Unani medicine; Integrative medicine; Ageing; Public health.

INTRODUCTION

Ageing is a natural and inevitable biological process characterized by a gradual decline in physiological functions and adaptive capacity. Globally, the proportion of older adults is increasing rapidly, posing significant challenges to health systems due to the rising prevalence of chronic non-communicable diseases, disabilities, and mental health disorders.^[1,2,3] In India, demographic transition has led to a substantial growth of the geriatric population, necessitating comprehensive and sustainable models of elderly care.^[4]

Modern medicine has made remarkable advances in the diagnosis and treatment of age-related diseases; however, geriatric care often requires more than disease-specific management. Older adults frequently present with multimorbidity, polypharmacy, psychosocial issues, and functional dependence, which demand a holistic and patient-centred approach.^[5,6,7] Traditional systems of medicine, including Unani, emphasize balance, prevention, and individualized care, making them

relevant in the context of geriatric health. Integrating Unani principles with modern medical practices may offer a more comprehensive approach to geriatric care that aligns with public health goals.

Concept of Ageing: Modern and Unani Perspectives Modern Medical View

From a biomedical perspective, ageing involves progressive structural and functional changes at cellular, tissue, and organ levels. These changes include reduced regenerative capacity, immunosenescence, hormonal alterations, and increased vulnerability to chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disorders, diabetes mellitus, osteoporosis, and neurodegenerative conditions.^[8,9,10] Ageing is also associated with psychological changes, including cognitive decline, depression, and anxiety, which significantly affect quality of life among older adults.^[11]

Unani Concept of Ageing

In Unani medicine, ageing is understood as a gradual decline in *Hararat-e-Ghariziya* (innate heat) and weakening of bodily faculties (*Quwa*), leading to diminished physiological efficiency.^[12, 13, 14] Age-related changes are also linked to alterations in *Mizaj* (temperament), which predispose older individuals to disease if balance is not maintained. Classical Unani scholars emphasized preservation of health in old age through moderation in diet, physical activity, and maintenance of mental well-being.^[12, 13]

Common Health Problems in the Geriatric Population

The geriatric population commonly experiences multiple coexisting health conditions, including musculoskeletal disorders such as osteoarthritis and osteoporosis, cardiovascular diseases including hypertension and ischemic heart disease, metabolic disorders like diabetes mellitus, cognitive impairment, depression, gastrointestinal problems, and sensory impairments.^[15, 16] Multimorbidity increases healthcare utilization and adversely affects functional independence and quality of life.^[17]

Modern Approaches to Geriatric Care

Modern geriatric care emphasizes comprehensive assessment and multidisciplinary management. Key components include preventive care through screening and immunization, rational pharmacotherapy with careful monitoring for polypharmacy and adverse drug reactions, lifestyle modification, mental health assessment, rehabilitation, and social support.^[18, 19] While these approaches have improved survival and disease control, challenges such as fragmented care, high costs, and limited accessibility persist, particularly in resource-limited settings.^[17]

Unani Approach to Geriatric Care

Unani medicine adopts a holistic approach to geriatric care with emphasis on prevention and maintenance of health. Therapeutic strategies include **Ilaj-bil-Ghiza** (dietotherapy), which advocates easily digestible and nutritious diets suited to the altered temperament of old age; **Ilaj-bil-Tadbeer** (regimenal therapy), including physical activity, massage, and regulation of sleep and rest; and **Ilaj-bil-Dawa** (pharmacotherapy), which involves the use of single and compound formulations aimed at strengthening bodily faculties and improving vitality.^[12, 13, 14, 20] These principles emphasize moderation, routine, and mental tranquillity as essential components of healthy ageing.

Integrative Model of Geriatric Care

An integrative approach to geriatric care seeks to combine the strengths of modern medicine and Unani principles in a complementary manner. Modern diagnostics and evidence-based treatments can be integrated with Unani lifestyle and preventive strategies to address the multidimensional needs of older adults.

Such an approach may improve adherence to treatment, reduce adverse effects related to polypharmacy, and enhance overall well-being.^[21, 22] Evidence-based integration, supported by research and clinical guidelines, is essential to ensure safety and effectiveness.

Public Health and Policy Implications

Integration of traditional systems of medicine with modern healthcare aligns with national and global strategies promoting holistic and culturally acceptable healthcare.^[23, 24] In India, strengthening community-based geriatric services and incorporating evidence-based Unani practices within public health programmes may improve accessibility, affordability, and continuity of care for older adults, particularly in underserved areas.^[4, 23]

CONCLUSION

Geriatric care requires a multidimensional approach that addresses physical, psychological, and social aspects of ageing. Modern medicine offers effective disease-specific management, while Unani medicine contributes holistic and preventive strategies rooted in individualized care. An evidence-based integrative approach has the potential to enhance quality of life, functional independence, and overall well-being among older adults. Further research and policy support are required to develop standardized integrative models of geriatric care and to strengthen their implementation within public health systems.

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