This year commemorates the celebration of the fifth annual International Yoga Day (IYD). Since its inception on June 21, 2015, the movement has been growing every year, attracting the participation of an increasing number of people and nations. Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, who proposed the idea of an IYD, emphasized the importance of Yoga in attaining oneness with the self, the world and nature. His landmark speech highlighted the importance of Yoga for improving universal health and well-being. The 175 member-states of the United Nations unanimously endorsed India’s proposal to observe an IYD at its 2014 General Assembly [1].

The UN resolution helped reintroduce Yoga to the modern world and significantly enhanced its awareness. The increased global visibility of Yoga has generated much expectation. An integral approach of Yoga and Ayurveda together with effective elements of other health sciences can transform healthcare and the practice of modern medicine [2].

Yoga and Ayurveda are the twin precious gifts from India to the world. Just as Yoga channelizes the potential of the mind and body, Ayurveda helps achieve and maintain health. They are but one unified concept, inseparable and holistic. The fundamental goal of Yoga is to unleash the power of the mind including for wellness and health towards the ultimate enlightenment. Similarly, Ayurveda aspires attainment of Swasthya—the totality of health and harmony in all stages of life. Yoga illuminates approaches to life through physical, social, mental, behavioral, cultural, and spiritual dimensions. Ayurveda, which literally means “knowledge of life”, encompasses the same objectives. The concepts of Triguna and Tridosha are discussed in the ancient texts of both sciences; both put forth parallel concepts, such as Nadi-Srotosha (channels), Shuddhi Kriya-Panchakarma (therapeutic procedures for harmonizing systems), and Yama-Niyama-Sadhvrita (disciplined lifestyle). Ayurveda proposes Svvasthavritta (the paradigm for the prevention and protection from disease and, promotion of positive health), but its guidelines on lifestyle and behavior are based on Yoga theory.

The great thinkers of Ayurveda, such as Charaka and Sushruta, based their teaching on Yogic principles, widely practiced during their era.

Despite their essential unity, current approaches to education, pedagogy, curricula, practice and research of Yoga and Ayurveda often ignore their integral and fundamental interrelationships. Today, Yoga is widely practiced and has grown exponentially into a multi-billion dollar industry; however, its core essence is most often overlooked. Practitioners of Yoga generally avail themselves of only a fraction of its vast possibilities. Yoga is often limited to a lifestyle intervention or a behavioral therapy through a package dominated by physical movements and poses. Lamentably, Yoga also suffers from distortions into a plethora of versions and proprietary branding and variations that are in large part the result of marketing goals. While the fundamental and valuable principles of Ayurveda are widely recognized, currently, on a global scale, the practice of Ayurveda is marginal, the exception being within the Indian subcontinent; even in India, the focus is mainly on herbal medicines. Ayurveda education, in its theory and practice, provides very limited exposure to Yoga. Although, there are cursory references in curricula, practical exposure to Yoga is rare in Ayurveda schools and colleges in India. The student of Ayurveda has no educational tools for the precepts and practice of Yoga. The artificial separation of Ayurveda and Yoga becomes even more pronounced in research, and especially in clinical practice.

Ayurvedic concepts such as nutrition and other lifestyle modifications, combined with Yoga, could provide a valid framework for personalized interventions aimed at restoring health. Combined with Yoga, Ayurveda can expand its universal appeal and overall effectiveness. The resulting powerful synergy of AyurYoga would certainly add to the physician’s therapeutic arsenal, thus reinforcing the credibility of both systems. Yoga should be a part of Ayurveda curricula because the conceptual foundations are the same. Yoga is a practical reflection of the inclusive Vedic thought and it is never in contradiction with any global thought or philosophy. Teaching institutes of modern medicine, AVUSH (traditional health systems of India), and public health systems need to follow this inclusive and integrated approach to healing. Academic institutions should ensure that prospective doctors and healthcare professionals have training and experience in Yoga. The Medical Council of India, the custodian of medical education standards, has traditionally and aggressively prevented entry of Ayurveda and Yogic concepts in the curricula of medical courses, due to a baseless fear of lowering the standards of teaching. The council must rethink its stance. Prevailing policies and regulations are major constraints in the advancement of India’s vital research contributions to world medicine. The exclusion of Ayurveda and Yoga in medical curricula in Indian institutions of learning is particularly ironic, given the rapid development of the discipline of mind-body medicine at centers of excellence in Western medical schools such as Harvard, Columbia, Johns Hopkins, Stanford, University of California, and research centers in Europe. Research in this area is progressing at a remarkable pace, with thousands of peer-reviewed articles published in the last ten years bearing testimony to the truth of this emerging science. Furthermore, there is clear recognition that this new discipline owes its origin to ancient Eastern wisdom [3].

Many challenges are still to be overcome to realize the optimal potential of AyurYoga. Many initiatives that are recently launched deserve appreciation. The AVUSH Ministry of the government of

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India has established a Yoga Certification Board to ensure the quality of Yoga teachers and therapists. This board regulates teaching, assessment, and registration of Yoga professionals. The Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune (India), has established the Ramkumar Rathi Patanjali Yoga Chair in its Interdisciplinary School of Health Sciences. The Chair provides a platform for the building of research capacity in Yoga. A recent symposium hosted by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) at Rishikesh (India), brought together researchers and clinicians from the fields of Yoga, Ayurveda, and modern medicine. This symposium focused on Yoga-based meditation approaches for the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular diseases. The Ohio State University College of Medicine, Columbus, Ohio (United States), has developed an innovative course combining Ayurveda and Yoga, especially conceived for the Western audience [4]. The course is based on the fundamentals of Ayurveda and Yoga, supported by emerging scientific literature. Several medical scientists have contributed reflections on integrative approaches to health. These provide not only a clear insight into the historical roots of the healing traditions of India, but also into the entire concept of integrative approaches for health [5]. Such initiatives and ideas should be widely developed and disseminated. The Journal of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine is committed to facilitate this process. Victor Hugo wrote: “Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come”. The emergence of the concept of AyurYoga is one such powerful idea, whose time has indeed dawned. In this fifth year of the observance of International Yoga Day, the continuing challenge to the world community and especially to India—the voice of Yoga—is to “Recognize and promote the vital nexus between Yoga (science of the mind) and Ayurveda (science of life), based on understanding the unity of their conceptual foundation as well as the unity of their purpose and practice”. Sushruta, the ancient Indian physician and surgeon, affirmed in his great wisdom that a physician who is adept at only one discipline is restricted in his healing skills. To be optimally effective, multidisciplinary approaches are necessary. Thus, the emergence of AyurYoga needs to be conceived as part of the triple grand confluence (Triveni Sangam) of the sciences. This confluence includes Yoga, Ayurveda, and Western sciences of healing with their rigor and inherent ability to grow from the progress of science and technology. It is then that we will begin to realize the limitless promise and potential of this confluence for the health and vigor of the individual, the community, and the entire world.

We ardently invite the global community of thought leaders, policy makers, research scientists, and practitioners of medicine to join in concert to address this challenging task of integral growth of healing science. We especially look to the new resurgent India and its newly-mandated government under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to lead the world in this endeavor.

Conflicts of interest

None.

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