Sir,

We read with much interest the thought-provoking article — “What do Ayurveda postgraduate entrance examinations (PGEEs) actually assess?” The article covers the results of a five-year period question-paper analysis, based on Bloom’s taxonomy” [1]. The authors have rightly pointed out the flaws in the current examination system in Ayurveda. It is an eye opener for all the stake-holders of educational system of Ayurveda in India.

The authors have used the six levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy in cognitive domain to classify the Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) from Ayurveda PGEEs conducted in different universities. Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives happens to be one of the most often used models while designing the different training, learning and examination methods. However, it is interesting to note that certain components of this taxonomy can be traced back to Ayurveda. The qualities requisite in teachers and students of Ayurveda and certain elements of our ancient methods of pedagogy, described in Charaka, still has much to offer for excellence in Ayurvedic education.

Ayurveda stresses primarily on the basic concepts narrated in the different Darshanas of Indian philosophy for knowledge discourse. The Nyaya school of thought focuses on modes of veracity of any event/object/property which are known as pramanas. These pramanas are competent and complementary modes to test veracity in any science (and hence are not limited only to Ayurveda). These are five in number viz. Apta, Pratyaksha, Upamana, Anumana and Yukti [2]. Ayurvedic pedagogy has to take pramanas into consideration in planning of the syllabus, curriculum as well as for the modes of testing educational deliverables.

Apta pramana implies authentic statements from the seers, who are bereft of rajoguna and tamoguna. The latter two introduce bias in intuition, cognition and expression of truth. Pratyaksha pramana is an objectively confirmed veracity by direct perception by senses or their extensions. Upamana pramana is a mode of veracity by analogy. Anumana pramana, on the other hand, involves robust correlative association for veracity. Yukti pramana is a pragmatic application of gained knowledge and innovative thinking to novel situations and confirming the truth. The integrative journey of an individual mind, from Apta pramana to Yukti pramana, suggests a pedagogic advancement of its cognitive capacities. While Apta pramana challenges the user to reduce Rajas and Tamas through Yoga, the Yukti pramana needs the cultivation of Pratutpanna Mati — an enlightened intellect that can apply fresh, analytical, rational and imaginative thinking to the problem/situation on hand. For the approach of Yukti pramana, a capacity to think ‘out of the box’, an aptitude for learning newer sciences and a deep motivation for synthesis of ideas/evidence are most essential. This process antedates the Bloom’s taxonomy, wherein the level of difficulty increases gradually from a mere ‘recall’ to an application of mind in ‘evaluation’.

It should also be taken into account that since memorization is the dominant teaching and evaluative method in schools and colleges, prior to the entrance to Ayurvedic colleges, the BAMS students need a reorientation to Yukti and other pramanas. The inclusion of questions based on Yukti pramana can then be considered at BAMS examination too. For MD final or PhD entrance examinations questions related to Anumana and Yukti pramanas need to be dominant, particularly in practical/case examinations/viva voce.

The strength of memory for Apta sutrás, observational and instrumental skills for Pratyaksha verification, imaginative creativity to analogize for Upamana evidence, correlative competency for Anumana synthesis and situational insights for Yukti individualistic applications are the pedagogic goals of Ayurvedic education. These attainments, amongst themselves, are mutually fulfilling and never contrarian. A renaissance in Ayurvedic education demands, firstly, an integrative reorientation and advanced training of the faculty to inculcate the spirit of being Vaidya-Scientists [3]. A continuous (monthly) assessment of the undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD students for their attitudes, skills, knowledge, motivation and performance will supplant the current panic-inducing examination system. Then, we may look forward to a utopia of examination-free degree courses. But such a view will be confronted with disbelief. Beveridge wrote many years back, “The scepticism with which the experts nearly always greet the revolutionary ideas confirms that the available knowledge has been a handicap.” There is a need to inculcate in the faculty and students of Ayurveda a world view that as shastras are infinite so are sciences.

References

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