

Is Homoeopathy contributing to the universal health coverage goal of #HealthForAll?

Subhash Kaushik

Author(s) ORCID Identifier:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2851-1377>

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Abstract

The expansion of health service coverage, a key target of the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, has seen limited progress in recent years, further hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the financial protection has witnessed a decline. Fifty percent of the global population lacks access to essential health services. An estimated 2 billion people grapple with financial hardships resulting from out-of-pocket health expenses, including 344 million individuals residing in extreme poverty.

On 12 December 2012, a historic resolution endorsing the acceleration of progress towards Universal Health Coverage (UHC) as a paramount international development priority was unanimously endorsed by the United Nations. Two years later, on 12 December 2014, the Universal Health Coverage Coalition initiated the celebration of December 12 as UHC Day, emphasising the importance of holding leaders accountable for their commitment to #HealthForAll. Recognising the significance of this initiative, the United Nations officially designated December 12 as International Universal Health Coverage Day on 12 December 2017. In December 2023, the global community renewed its commitment to achieving UHC for all with the adoption of the United Nations Political Declaration on UHC (21 September 2023). Now, there is a call for immediate and tangible steps to reignite progress, emphasising the need for concrete actions following this renewed commitment.

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The primary goal of UHC is to provide access to quality health-care services for everyone, regardless of their financial status, and to protect individuals and communities from financial risks associated with health-care expenses. UHC comprises two components, i.e., comprehensive health-care services, including prevention, promotion, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care as well as ensuring that the cost of health-care services does not lead to financial catastrophe for individuals or families.^[3] To provide these services effectively, it is essential to have a well-balanced and proficient mix of health and care workers at every tier of the health-care system. These professionals should be distributed fairly, receive ample support, have access to products of assured quality and experience satisfactory working conditions.^[3]

Homoeopathy has long been a part of the medical system of the hundred member states of the World Health Organization,^[4] delivering especially at the level of primary health care. Homoeopathic medicines may help reduce the burden on allopathic outpatient departments. It treats chronic illnesses carefully and at a reasonable rate, benefitting the society. After all, patients' treatment choices are of utmost importance in

evidence-based medicine. Homoeopathic medicine has the potential to serve as a strong pillar of complementary treatment modality and contribute substantially to achieving universal health care, especially in India and other countries where treatment cost is integral for health choices.^[5]

The past few decades, including the recent COVID-19 pandemic, have seen some good quality evidence in public health where Homoeopathy has played significant preventive and curative roles.^[6-9] In fact, the model of having Homoeopathy as one of the modalities has also been evaluated in terms of patient's choice in public health by a few studies.^[10-12]

Despite having evidence for the usefulness and effectiveness of Homoeopathy in realising the goal of health for all, the way forward may include policy reforms that support the integration of different health-care modalities; community engagement, sensitising those concerned towards Homoeopathy as a treatment option, with the provision of Homoeopathy at all decision-making health platforms for patients; including Homoeopathy in health promotion activities, etc. Simultaneously, all sorts of trials (superiority, non-inferiority and equivalence) and countrywide surveys aiming to strengthen Homoeopathy as a credible and well-accepted system for public health and beyond will complement the efforts towards creating Homoeopathy-inclusive plans for assuring #HealthForAll.

On UHC Day and beyond, concerted efforts are needed to address the challenges posed in delivering health care at all levels and to all people, advocate for inclusivity and take tangible actions towards integrating alternative systems of medicine like Homoeopathy for holistic and pluralistic health care.

In this issue, the results of a cross-sectional study showcasing the use of Homoeopathy in patients of non-communicable diseases are reported, demonstrating the positive impact of the Integration of Homoeopathy and Yoga in National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke. The study shows that the majority of the patients acknowledging the benefits of homoeopathic medicine and noticing considerable changes in their health condition after taking Homoeopathy along with Yoga.^[13] We also report a study on the impact of homoeopathic medicines on fungal infection and the growth of plants.^[14] This issue also features evidence-based case reports showcasing the successful homoeopathic treatment of nasal polyp^[15], tinea capitis^[16] and pancreatitis.^[17]

As we turn the page to another year, may the New Year 2024 bring renewed dedication for the advancement of research

and groundbreaking discoveries in Homeopathy, with thus, a positive impact for a healthier world.

Subhash Kaushik*

Central Council for Research in Homeopathy, New Delhi, India.

E-mail: subhashccrh@gmail.com

Received: 12 December 2023; Accepted: 12 December 2023

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Access this article online

Quick Response Code:

Available in print
version only

Website:

www.ijrh.org

DOI:

10.53945/2320-7094.2021

How to cite this article: Kaushik S. Is Homeopathy contributing to the universal health coverage goal of #HealthForAll? *Indian J Res Homoeopathy* 2023;17:210-211.