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Dermatology

A REVIEW OF CAUSES OF CANCER IN IRANIAN TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES: Historical records indicate that Iranian physicians are always trying to find ways to detect cancer (as an incurable disease) and eliminate the causes in order to treat or even prevent cancer. This historical library study attempts to investigate a small part of Iranian Physicians statements about causes of cancer throughout history (3-6th century AD).

SEARCH METHOD: The authors reviewed the cancer statement and it causes in the most famous Iranian traditional medicine books such as Canon, Hedayatalmotealemin and... .

FINDINGS: Findings of this study in ancient Iranian texts indicated that various factors involved in cancer:

Four humours: According to Avicenna, cancer originates from a burnt mucus/bile material changed into an atrabilious substance. Akhawaini in his book described how cancer is formed in the body. Moreover he talked about mucus, poor consistent mucus, weakness of digestive ability, preparedness of infected member, and digestion problem.

Nutrition and drugs: Avicenna in different parts of the Law book points out the role of nutrition in created negative, sickening and deadly mucus. He also talked about carcinogenic substances such as onions, eggplant, beef, and lentils if to be used excessively. Jorjani in his writings also considered nutrition as an effective factor in cancer. For example, he stated that eating too much meat causes cancer in those who are less physically active. Also, warm herbals may stimulate bowel cancer.

Environment: Ancient Iranian physicians explained number of cancer was increased in autumn, in contaminated environments, heavy work and insomnia.

Location of the lesion and gender: It was said that cancer appears more often in spongy organs. Therefore, breast and uterine cancer is more observed in women. Pharynx, testis, penis and intestinal cancer were more observed in men.

CONCLUSION: There are various factors such as four humors, Nutrition, environment and gender for cancer in traditional medicine.

KEYWORDS : cancer, traditional medicine, Iran

INTRODUCTION:

Cancer is a group of diseases involving abnormal cell growth with the potential to invade or spread to other parts of the body. 1 Cancer is considered as an incurable disease and related causes have always been examined by the physicians in the history of medicine in traditional and modern medicine. 2

Cancer is one of the most important diseases from ancient time, which is mentioned by early Islamic and Iranian physicians such as Avicenna, Akhawaini and Jorgani. They knew the different kind of cancer and have distinguished between various causes of cancers.3

Traditional medicine comprises medical aspects of traditional knowledge that developed over generations within various societies before the era of modern medicine. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines traditional medicine as "the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness". 4 Nowadays, according to increasing the diseases throughout the world and given the limitation of health-related resources, particularly among underdeveloped countries, traditional medicines (TM) have been advised by World Health Organization (WHO) as complementary or alternative for current classic medicine. 5,6

Historical records indicate that physicians are always trying to find ways to detect cancer and eliminate the causes in order to treat or even prevent cancer. 7Great Iranian physicians , particularly Avicenna, have an important role in the formation of medical knowledge in this field and they have written various books to transfer their knowledge in the field of cancer to the next generation. 8

This historical library study attempts to investigate a small part of Iranian Physicians statements about causes of cancer throughout history (3th-6th century AD).

METHODS:

There is a general consensus among researchers that the Cochrane systematic reviews serve as the gold standard of systematic reviews. First, all systematic reviews with or without meta-analysis found in Cochrane database, comprising 35 articles on cancer in traditional medicine, were carefully studied. In also most famous Iranian traditional medicine books such as Canon, Hedayatalmotealemin were carefully studied. Subsequently, we searched MEDLINE, EMBASE, Google Scholar, ISI Web of Knowledge, and National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), Journals@Ovid, and Books@Ovid for relevant studies performed from 2000 to 2015. A combination of Medical Subject Heading (MeSH) and text words such as cancer, traditional medicine, Iran. It should be noted that regardless of publication dates, the selection of articles was restricted to English language.

RESULTS:

Findings of this study indicated that cancer in ancient Iranian texts were discussed under edema topic classified as cold edema and cold inflammation. 9,10 From the perspective of ancient medicine, there are various factors involved in cancer:

Four humours: According to Avicenna, cancer originates from a burnt mucus/bile material changed into a atrabilious substance. In other words, it is another kind of burnt phlegm in which you can find a bile substance changed in to atrabilious substance. 11 Akhawaini in his book mentioned causes of cancer and describes how it is formed in the body. Moreover he talked about mucus, poor consistent mucus, weakness of digestive ability, preparedness of infected member, and digestion problem. He stated that all these symptoms refer to theory of four humours and their changes.12

Nutrition and drugs: theory of four humours may not lead to neglect of nutrition in cancer. Avicenna in different parts of the Law book points out the role of nutrition in created negative, sickening and deadly mucus.13 in his second book of the Law, he talked about carcinogenic substances such as onions, eggplant, beef, and lentils if to be used excessively. 14 Jorjani in his writings also considered nutrition as an effective factor in cancer. For example, he stated that eating too much meat causes cancer in those who are less physically active. Also, warm herbals may stimulate bowel cancer. 15

Underlying causes: sometimes cancer caused by some other diseases that are not treated, like breast and genitalia diseases.16-18

Jorjani classified atrabilious inflammation into two categories called "Skaros" (a type of cancer that has waved edema) and cancer. The difference between these two is related to no symptoms of pain, fever, and swelling vessels in Skaros. Jorjani and Avicenna both stressed that if no appropriate treatment exist, Skaros may be changed into cancer.20,21 Avicenna also considered "Khenazir" as a factor of cancer occurrence (its symptoms similar to lymphadenopathy and svc syndrome) that he explained that is not treated may rise to Skaros followed by cancer. Some physicians have considered external factors such as leeches , stinging of insects and animals as underlying causes of cancer. 14

Environment: ancient Iranian physicians considered environmental factors as factors involved in cancer including increased number of cancer in autumn, in contaminated environments, heavy work and insomnia. 22

Location of the lesion and gender: it was said that cancer appears more often in spongy organs. Therefore, breast and uterine cancer is more observed in women. Pharynx, testis, penis and intestinal cancer were more observed in men.

CONCLUSION:

Traditional Iranian scientists had an incredible point of view on finding causes for disorders and when we match them to new strategies nowadays we recognize most of the time the traditional theory is also right. because of that it is a good opportunity to research on traditional theories and combine them with new ideas and materials to discover scientific principles and methods or new treatments ways and drugs. As the interesting logical prove behind Iranian traditional theories more research on them is recommended.

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