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## Review

## Perception of health promotion in Unani herbal medicine

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## ABSTRACT

The Unani system of medicine is an age old, time tested system of Greek medicine dating back 2500 years. Like any other form of medical science, Unani medicine strives to find the best possible ways by which a person can lead a healthy life with minimum or zero sickness. Unani scholars believe that diseases can be kept at bay by the use of clean and fresh water, breathing clean air and consuming fresh food. Likewise, a balance should be maintained between the mind and the body so that the metabolic processes can operate easily and the body wastes evacuated. Unani medicine believes in promotion of health, prevention of diseases and cures through regimental and diet therapies.

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## 1. Introduction

The name *Unani* derived from a Greek word *Ionian*, means the knowledge of the states of the human body in health and ill-

ness (decline of health). *Unani* medicine refers to a tradition of Greco-Arabic medicine which is based on the teachings of Greek physician Buqrat (Hippocrates; 460–370 BC) and Roman physician Jalinoos (Galen) and developed into an elaborate

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medical system by Arab and Persian physicians such as Al Razi (Rhazes), Ibn sina (Avicenna), Al Zahrawi and Ibn Nafis. It is a popular form of traditional medicine widely practised in South Asia and draws on the ancient traditional systems of medicine in China, Egypt, India, Iraq, Persia and Syria (Ahmad, 1983; Sina, 2007).

Health is a common theme in most cultures. In fact, all communities have their concept of health as part of their culture. Among definitions still used, probably the oldest is that good health is the absence of diseases. According to the World Health Organization, good health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. It can be construed as a feeling of wholeness and a happy frame of mind. It is not merely an issue of doctors, social services and hospitals but an issue of social justice and is not perceived in the same way by all members of a community including various professional groups (e.g., biomedical scientists, social scientists, health administrators, ecologists, etc.) giving rise to confusion about the concept of health. The holistic concept recognises the strength of social, economic, political and environmental influences on health. It implies that all sectors of society have an effect on health, in particular, agriculture, animal husbandry, food, industry, education, housing, public works, communications and other sectors. The emphasis is on the promotion and protection of health (Mahahan, 2009; Parik, 2010).

Health promotion is the process of enabling people to increase control over and to improve their health. It is not directed against any particular disease but is intended to strengthen the host via a variety of approaches or interventions. The well known interventions in this area are health education, environmental modification, notional interventions, life style and behavioural changes. Unani medicine considers many factors in maintaining health and divides the body in a number of ways to define this wisdom. The first way that Unani medicine defines the body is to describe it in terms of the four humours. It further defines the state of the body into three different stages: health, disease and neutral. In the footsteps of both the *Quran* and *hadiths*, Unani Pathy sees illness as an opportunity to serve, clean, purify and balance the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual planes. Towards this goal, Unani therapies are natural which include appropriate fresh food in order to correct the imbalances, herbal medicines, drugs of animal and mineral origin, the promotion of codes of conduct conducive to positive health and appropriate rest for prevention and cure. It also emphasises compounds that belong to the human body and the avoidance of allergy-rendering foods. The balance between mind and body is also crucial in the metabolic processes and counselling is often offered towards this goal (Mahahan, 2009; Unani doctors, 2011).

The best possible ways of health promotion in this holistic system of medicine are improvement of *Tabiyat* (Medicatrix naturae or Immunity) by immunomodulators, restoration of balanced temperament, maintenance of balance in the quality and quantity of humours, moderation of *Asbaabe Sitta Zarooriya* (six essential factors for life) and adoption of *Ilaj Bil Tadabeer* (Regimental therapy), *Munzij wa Mushil* (concoctive

and purgative) therapy and *Ilaj bil ghiza* (Dieto-therapy) (Kabeeruddin, 1999, 2009).

## 2. Improvement of *tabiyat* (immunomodulation)

According to the Unani discipline as it stands today, the human body is composed of seven natural and basic components called *Umoore Tabaiyah* which are responsible for the maintenance of good health. These are *Arkan* (Elements), *Mizaj* (Temperament), *Akhlaat* (Humours), *Aaza* (Organs), *Arwah* (Vital forces), *Quwa* (Faculties) and *Afaal* (Functions). For the proper functioning of the body, all the above mentioned components should be present and work in concert with each other. The loss of any one of these basic components or alteration in their physical state could lead to disease, or even death. It is highly essential to consider all these factors so as to reach the correct diagnosis and consequently the correct line of treatment (Sina, 1987).

Unani medicine describes the concept of *Tabiyat*, which is a supreme planner of the body to create a healthy environment within the body and prepare to fight against disease. If *Tabiyat* is strong, then a man does not suffer from a disease easily, if it weakens, a man becomes prone to disease. The *Tabiyat* may be defined as the sum total of structural, functional and psychological character of the human being. According to Hippocrates, there is a special ability hidden in every individual called the defensive mechanism of the body or in the language of Unani Pathy, *Tabiyate Muddabare Badan*. This *Tabiyat* is the best physician, and maintains the equilibrium of four body humours. Broadly speaking *Tabiyat* is considered as the real healer of the body and the role of the *Tabeeb* (physician) is to facilitate this *Tabiyat* (Rushid, 1987).

A well known Unani Scholar, *Rabban Tabri* in his treatise, *Firdousal Hikmat* has mentioned that, practically *Tabiyat* is regarded as an administrative power of the body. The function of administration of the body is accomplished by *Tabiyat* with the help of many powers called *Quwwa* of the body like *Quwwat tabaiyya* (Physical faculty), *Quwwate haiwania* (Vital faculty) and *Quwwate nafsania* (Nervous faculty). Thus the main role of the *Tabiyat* is to provide the general administration as well as defense or immunity to the body. Immunity is a part of this *Tabiyat*. Unani physicians recommended improving or strengthening the *Tabiyat* for restoration of health and the management of diseases. For this purpose they have mentioned various drugs under the headings of *muqawwe azae raisa* (tonic for vital organs), *muqawwe badan* (general body tonic), *muqawwe asab* (nervine tonic), *muqqawwe qalb* (cardiac tonic), *muqqawwe jigar* (liver tonic), etc. In contemporary systems of medicine, the concept of immunomodulators means the sources of the enhancement of the immunity (Tabri, 2003).

Unani medicine offers a number of drugs of plant, mineral and animal origin that have immunomodulation activity and efficacy to strengthen the immunity system, hence such drugs can be safely used in auto-immune diseases like ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, cancer, Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis, etc. Examples of such drugs are *Lehsun* (*Allium sativum*), *Kalonji* (*Nigella sativa*),

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