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'Cancer patients can't be guinea pigs for ayurveda'

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Bengaluru: Set up nearly two years ago, the ayurveda unit at the government-run Kidwai Memorial Institute of Oncology may shut down. Reason: the institute director says the facility hasn't conducted any ground-breaking research and the memorandum of understanding (MoU) ends in March 2019.

"With due respect to ayurveda and the rich resources available in our country, no ayurvedic treatment has proven to be effective for cancer. Not even level-1 research has been done so far. Poor patients who visit Kidwai seeking treatment can't be used as guinea pigs. The unit's term ends in March and I have asked them to vacate," said Dr C Ramachandra, director of the cancer institute.

The MoU was signed between the medical education department and Ayush (ayurveda, yoga and naturopathy, unani, siddha and homoeopathy) department in March 2017.

The clinic set up in Kidwai's palliative care section is full of ayurvedic drugs neatly stacked in racks. During a recent visit by **TOL**, a yoga session was being conducted by an ayurveda expert for some patients. "Departments like radiology and palliative care refer cases to us and we treat patients with a holistic approach. Over 60 patients have opted for treatment. The MoU is not time-bound and can be reviewed," said an ayurveda practitioner from the unit.

While it's up to the patient to seek ayurvedic inter-

No proof of effectiveness: Kidwai director

"We have no problem with meditation or yoga classes. But when it comes to ayurvedic medicine, there's no proof of its effectiveness. We've had cancer patients who were treated in Kidwai opting for alternative treatment elsewhere and coming back to us with adverse effects of the drugs. We want to know what's the active ingredient in ayurvedic medicine. For instance, Stage 1 cancer is treatable. Has there been any research in ayurveda where Stage 1 cases have been treated with ayurvedic drugs alone?"

Dr C Ramachandra | KIDWAI DIRECTOR

WILL WRITE TO HIM: AYUSH OFFICIAL

Dr BS Sridhar, joint director, Ayush, said the department will write to National Ayush Mission to take up a research project on cancer at Kidwai. "I will write to the Kidwai director and convene a meeting to resolve the issue. We require a 50-bed facility to take up research. In the past two years, confidence in ayurveda has increased and gradually, patients are getting referred to the ayurvedic unit. To take up full-fledged research, we need grants and manpower.

and we will make a requisition to the National Ayush Mission," said Dr Sridhar.

"Cancer may not be mentioned in ayurvedic texts, but there are equivalent conditions for which the effectiveness of medicines has been proven. For example, a drug called Arogya Varthini is helpful in curing liver disorder and can be used by those suffering from liver cancer. Using well-known medication is not experimentation," added Dr Sridhar.

vention, the institute has raised questions about the research. "We have no problem with meditation or yoga classes. But when it comes to ayurvedic medicine, there's no proof of its effectiveness. We've had cancer patients who were treated in Kidwai opting for alternative treatment elsewhere and coming back to us with adverse effects of the drugs. We want to know what's the active ingredient in ayurvedic medicine? For instance, Stage 1 cancer is treatable. Has there been any research in ayurveda where Stage 1 cases have been treated with ayurvedic drugs alone," asked Dr Ramachandra.

The state health department recently issued a circu-

lar to all taluk and district-level hospitals to use Ayush medicines while treating non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Dr Ratan Kelkar, mission director, National Health Mission, said it could be case of miscommunication. "It was noticed earlier that the staffers deputed at the ayurveda unit were not paid properly and the issue must have been resolved by now. But regarding ayurvedic treatment of cancer patients, a framework and guidelines need to be prepared by a committee comprising both oncologists and ayurveda specialists. That's what we have done to treat non-communicable diseases in government hospitals," he said.