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Research Paper

**PRACTICE OF CANCER PALLIATIVE CARE - AN ANCIENT WISDOM
IN AYURVEDA**

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Abstract –

Palliative care, the holistic and compassionate approach to alleviating the suffering of individuals facing life-limiting illnesses, has evolved significantly over the years. One ancient ideal approach to palliative care is the integration of yoga, a millennia-old practice that seeks to harmonize the mind, body, and spirit. This abstract provides an overview of how yoga, when applied in a palliative care context, can contribute to improving the quality of life for patients facing serious illness. Patients and their families who are struggling with the burdens of a life-threatening illness benefit from palliative care., whether they be mental, emotional, social, or spiritual. The standard of living for caretakers also rises.

Yoga offers a unique and comprehensive system that addresses the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of well-being. In the context of palliative care, it can be a valuable tool for symptom management, emotional support, and spiritual reflection. The physical postures (Asanas), breath control (Pranayama), and meditation techniques promote relaxation, relieve pain, and enhance physical and mental strength. Additionally, these Yoga Vidhya help individuals manage the symptoms of chronic conditions and side effects of treatments. Yoga is a perfect approach to include this along with traditional measures. Yoga balances the body, mind, emotions, and spirit; it makes people feel satisfied and happy; and it enhances the quality of life for patients and those who provide care for them.

Keywords – Quality of Life, Palliative Care, Ayurveda, Physical, Social, Spiritual.

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Introduction –

World Health Organization defines palliative care as an approach that improves the quality of life of patients (adults and children). It prevents and relieves suffering through early identification, correct assessment and treatment of pain and other problems,

whether physical, mental, psychosocial or spiritual. Addressing pain involves taking care of issues beyond the physical symptoms. This includes addressing practical needs and providing grief counselling. It provides a support system to help patients live as actively as possible until death¹.

Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering, by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual².

Palliative care aims to enhance quality of life and have a positive impact on the course of the illness. Palliative care is used to describe supportive care when the disease is no longer responsive to curative treatment; Thus, palliative care provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms, affirms life and accepts death as a normal process. It provides a support system to help patients live as actively as possible until death and uses a team approach to meet the needs of patients and their families. Pain relief is an extremely important component of palliative care, especially in cancer treatment. Palliative care provides a forum for communication with the patient and families, rehabilitation for maximum independence, continuity of care, coordination between services, terminal care and to help families cope during the patient's illness and bereavement, Provides a support system³.

Palliative Care provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms. It intends neither to hasten or postpone death, however affirms life and regards dying as a normal process. It also offers a support system to help the family cope during the patient's illness and in their own bereavement by using team approach to address the needs of patients and their families, including bereavement counselling. Yoga is a potential tool to adjuvant palliative

care⁴. Yoga can be beneficial to patients as well as carers in palliative care settings⁵. Yoga improves the quality of life, and positively influences the course of illness also. It is applicable early in the course of illness, in conjunction with other therapies that are intended to prolong life, such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, and includes those investigations needed to better understand and manage distressing clinical complications. The relatively gentle and safe Yogic practices as per individual requirement are recommended under the guidance of Yoga expert⁶.

Need for Palliative Care –

The goal of Palliative Care is to relief of sufferings and improve the quality of life. Palliative care is essential in providing comprehensive, patient-centered care for individuals facing serious or life-limiting illnesses. It focuses on improving the patient's overall quality of life, managing symptoms, and addressing Physical, mental, emotional and psychological aspects of the disease, as well as providing support for families and caregivers. Palliative care is a specialized area of healthcare that focuses on providing relief from the symptoms and suffering associated with serious illnesses, particularly those that are life-limiting or life-threatening. There are several key reasons why palliative care is essential⁷:

Improving Quality of Life: Palliative care aims to enhance the quality of life for patients by managing pain, alleviating distressing symptoms, and addressing emotional, psychosocial, and spiritual needs⁸.

Relief from Pain and Symptoms: Palliative care helps patients manage pain, nausea, shortness of breath, and other symptoms,

often using a combination of medications, therapies, and other interventions⁹.

Communication and Decision-Making: Palliative care teams facilitate discussions between patients, their families, and medical professionals about treatment options, goals of care, and end-of-life decisions. This helps ensure that care aligns with the patient's wishes and values.

Coordination of Care: In many cases, palliative care providers work alongside the patient's primary medical team to ensure that care plans are well-coordinated and that the patient receives consistent and appropriate care.

Support for Caregivers: Caregivers often experience significant stress and burnout when providing care for a loved one with a serious illness. Palliative care can offer support and resources to help caregivers navigate these challenges¹⁰.

Transition to End-of-Life Care: For patients with terminal illnesses, palliative care helps with the transition to end-of-life care, offering comfort and support as individuals approach the final stages of life¹¹.

Respect for Patient Dignity: Palliative care places a strong emphasis on preserving the patient's dignity, autonomy, and control over their care, even in the face of a serious illness. Thus The concept of dignity is ubiquitous, featuring prominently in bioethics, human rights documents, codes of research involving human subjects, patients' bills of rights, and discussions of decision-making in end-of-life care¹².

Cultural and Spiritual Sensitivity: Palliative care is often trained to be culturally and spiritually sensitive, respecting the

diverse beliefs and values of patients and their families¹³.

Reducing Hospital Readmissions: Palliative care can help reduce unnecessary hospital admissions by managing symptoms effectively and supporting patients in their homes care¹⁴.

Cost-Effective Care: Research has shown that palliative care can be cost-effective by reducing unnecessary treatments, hospitalizations, and medical expenses for patients with advanced illnesses¹⁵. Palliative care is essential in providing comprehensive, patient-centered care for individuals facing serious or life-limiting illnesses. Palliative Care focuses on improving the patient's overall quality of life, managing symptoms, and addressing the emotional and psychological aspects of illness, while also providing support for families and caregivers.¹⁶

Dimensions of Palliative Care –

Palliative care is a specialized medical and holistic approach to care for individuals with serious or life-limiting illnesses. It focuses on improving the quality of life for patients and their families by addressing the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of the patient¹⁷. The dimensions of palliative care encompass a wide range of aspects, and they are often referred to as the "Four Pillars of Palliative Care." These dimensions include:

Physical Dimension:

Pain Management: Effective pain control is a central component of palliative care. This involves assessing and managing both chronic and acute pain to enhance the patient's comfort and functionality.

Symptom Management: Palliative care also addresses other distressing physical

symptoms such as nausea, fatigue, shortness of breath, and constipation.

Care for Advanced Illness: This dimension includes discussions and decisions about the use of life-sustaining treatments, advance care planning, and end-of-life care choices.

Psychological Dimension:

Emotional Support: Palliative care providers offer emotional support to patients and their families as they cope with the emotional challenges of a serious illness.

Counselling and Therapy: This may include counselling and psychological support to help patients and families understand and manage their emotional distress.

Addressing Anxiety and Depression: Palliative care teams often assess and treat anxiety and depression, which can be common in patients facing serious illnesses.

Social Dimension:

Family and Caregiver Support: Palliative care extends support to family members and caregivers, recognizing the emotional and practical challenges they face.

Communication: Effective communication is crucial in palliative care, involving discussions about care goals, treatment options, and end-of-life decisions.

Coordination of Care: Palliative care teams often work closely with other healthcare providers to ensure a seamless and coordinated approach to care.

Spiritual Dimension:

Palliative care addresses the spiritual and existential concerns of patients, helping them find meaning and purpose during their illness.

Religious and Cultural Needs: Care is provided in a way that respects the patient's

religious and cultural beliefs, and spiritual care can be provided if requested.

Palliative care is individualized and patient-centered, so these dimensions are adapted to the unique needs and goals of each patient and their family. The goal of palliative care is to provide comfort, relieve suffering, and improve the quality of life for individuals with serious illnesses, regardless of whether the illness can be cured or not¹⁸.

Role of Yoga in Quality of Life –

Yoga can play a significant role in enhancing the quality of life in numerous ways. It is a holistic practice that combines physical postures, breathing exercises, meditation, and ethical principles to promote physical, mental, and emotional well-being. There are some of the key roles of yoga in improving the quality of life¹⁹:

Physical Health:

Flexibility: Yoga involves a variety of poses and stretches that can improve flexibility and range of motion in the joints and muscles.

Strength: Many yoga poses require the use of body weight for resistance, which can help build and maintain muscle strength.

Balance and Coordination: Yoga poses often involve balancing on one leg or holding challenging positions, which can enhance balance and coordination.

Stress Reduction:

Mind-Body Connection: Yoga emphasizes the connection between the mind and body, helping individuals become more aware of their physical and mental states.

Relaxation: Yoga incorporates relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing and meditation, which can reduce stress and promote a sense of calm.

Cortisol Regulation: Regular yoga practice has been shown to lower cortisol levels (the stress hormone), which can have a positive impact on overall stress management.

Emotional Well-Being:

Mood Enhancement: Yoga can boost mood and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression by increasing the production of feel-good neurotransmitters like serotonin.

Emotional Resilience: Practicing mindfulness in yoga can help individuals become more resilient in the face of life's challenges and better manage their emotional responses.

Pain Management:

Chronic Pain Relief: Yoga has been shown to be effective in managing chronic pain conditions, such as back pain, arthritis, and migraines.

Mindful Pain Coping: Yoga encourages a mindful approach to pain, helping individuals better cope with pain and reduce suffering.

Better Sleep:

Sleep Quality: Regular yoga practice can improve sleep quality by relaxing the nervous system, reducing stress, and enhancing relaxation before bedtime.

Sleep Disorders: Yoga may be beneficial in managing sleep disorders like insomnia by promoting relaxation and calming the mind.

Enhanced Respiration:

Breathing Techniques: Yoga includes various breathing exercises (pranayama) that can improve lung capacity, increase oxygen intake, and enhance overall respiratory function.

Weight Management:

Mindful Eating: Yoga can promote mindfulness in daily life, including eating

habits, which may help with weight management and overall health.

Spiritual and Ethical Growth:

Values and Ethics: Yoga often incorporates ethical principles (yamas and niyamas) that encourage kindness, honesty, and compassion, contributing to personal growth and improved relationships.

Spiritual Connection: For some practitioners, yoga is a path to spiritual exploration and connection, offering a sense of purpose and inner peace.

Community and Support:

Yoga classes and communities can provide a sense of belonging, social support, and a supportive environment for personal growth and self-improvement.

Yoga for palliative care –

According to the World Health Organization's 2015 Palliative Care Fact Sheet, 78 percent of the 40 million individuals who require palliative care annually reside in low- and middle-income nations²⁰. Palliative care methods need to be created in order to meet the needs of the population affected by serious disease and improve their quality of life. India is the origin of yoga, a mind-body activity that has been practised there for more than 5000 years. Harmonization and balance of the physical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions of life are its objectives. Yoga has been practised for thousands of years, but using it as a form of therapy is still a relatively new and emerging trend in the medical field. Yoga for palliative care has

shown increases in the quality of sleep, mood, stress, management of physical symptoms, and overall quality of life, according to a growing body of studies^{21,22,23}. Palliative potential of home-based yoga sessions in women with advanced cancer was evaluated in a study. Enhanced mind-body and body-spirit connections, benefits at physical, mental, and emotional level as well as the alleviation of illness impacts were observed²⁴. Meditation and *pranayama*, along with the relaxing yoga poses, can help in dealing with the emotional aspects of chronic pain, reduce anxiety and depression effectively, and improve the quality of life²⁵. There is strong evidence to support the effectiveness of yoga practises in managing with anxiety and depression as well as lessening the effects of heightened stress reactions. It primarily affects the sympathetic nervous system and the hypothalamus pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis.²⁶

The emotion-regulation through present moment awareness, acceptance, and non-reactivity in mindfulness practices has the potential to enhance the quality of life and overcome fear of death. The relevance of the *yoga sutra* of Patanjali in end-of-life yoga care was explored by Taylor²⁷. Patanjali *yoga sutra* describes '*Abhinivesha*,' Sanskrit word meaning 'will to live' or 'clinging to life'. Fear of death is present in all aspects of human consciousness because of powerful attachments (*raga*) to objects of joy. Yoga practice is a complex intervention with varied components. Many different styles of yoga differ in approach and techniques. However, yoga practices can be adapted to the

individual needs and can be performed by persons having functional limitations. The following are the examples of some yoga practices useful in palliative care.

Gentle Yoga poses (Asanas):

Stretching that is supported and changed according to each person's needs is advised. Props used in restorative yoga positions help with stretching, offer support, and promote relaxation.²⁸ Asana reduces fatigue and pain in patients with cancer²⁹.

Regulated breathing techniques (pranayama):

By reducing sympathetic activity and increasing vagal activity, diaphragmatic breathing successfully lowers anxiety levels. Regardless of age or physical condition, anyone can do this anywhere, including in a hospital bed. Deep yogic breathing with prolonged exhalation relaxes most skeletal muscles and help to cope with stress and anxiety³⁰.

Gestures (mudra): Balancing, calming *mudra* (subtle physical movements) provide comfort and are easy to perform by anyone. Taylor³¹ suggested a few possibilities like *Anjali mudra*, *vajrapradama mudra*, *Padma mudra*, and *Adhi mudra* for end-of-life yoga therapy.

Meditation (dhyana): 'Internalized awareness', the peculiar feature of meditation, facilitates coping with stress³². Faith healing through spiritual means may be effective complementary therapies for pain and symptom's relief in palliative care.

Yoga Nidra (conscious, dynamic, yogic sleep): It provides complete relaxation, peace, self-awareness, and self-efficacy and reduces rage, anxiety, and emotional reactivity³³.

Nada Yoga (chanting mantra or singing):

It reduces anxiety and positively increases the EEG Alpha and general well-being³⁴.

Mindfulness:

This can be practiced anytime, anywhere, and suitable for even the most disabled patient. It is suggested that mindfulness-based practice can assist traumatized individuals in coping with the stresses encountered and assist them in facing the realities of sickness, pain and death.³⁵

Conclusion –

The integration of Yoga into palliative care represents a profound and ancient approach that holds significant promise for improving the quality of life for individuals facing life-limiting illnesses. By incorporating Yoga practices such as physical postures, breathing exercises, meditation, and mindfulness techniques, palliative care providers can offer patients a holistic and patient-centered approach to symptom management, emotional well-being, and overall quality of life. The evidence suggests that Yoga can be a valuable tool for enhancing pain management, reducing symptoms, and improving emotional regulation, ultimately contributing to a more positive palliative care experience. It empowers patients, enabling them to take an active role in their well-being and fostering a sense of control in the face of adversity. Additionally, it offers valuable strategies for caregivers, reducing their own stress and burnout while enhancing the support they provide to patients.

By fusing the psychological and spiritual facets of patient care, palliative care provides a system of support to help patients live as actively as they can until death. Yogic techniques assist a person to acknowledge,

accept, and cope with the truth of his situation. Regular yoga practise strengthens the body's general ability to combat challenging situations and enhances quality of life. Yoga has the potential to lessen the negative effects of conventional treatments including surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy while enhancing their intended results. It actively stimulates the psycho-neuro-immune system, which reverses the sickness process. Yoga has well-documented health advantages, making it the ideal complement to traditional medical treatments.

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