

Courses in ayurveda on the cards at DUT

University and Indian government sign deal to establish chair

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SOUTH Africa may soon be able to certify its own ayurvedic practitioners.

This follows the signing yesterday of a memorandum of understanding between the Durban University of Technology (DUT) and representatives of the Indian government to establish a chair in ayurvedic medicine at the tertiary institution.

Durban Indian consul general Anil Sharan said establishing an ayurvedic chair at DUT was a knowledge-sharing exercise which would have no economic spin-off for India.

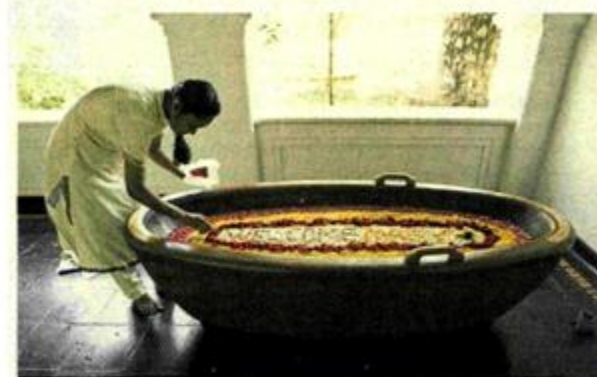
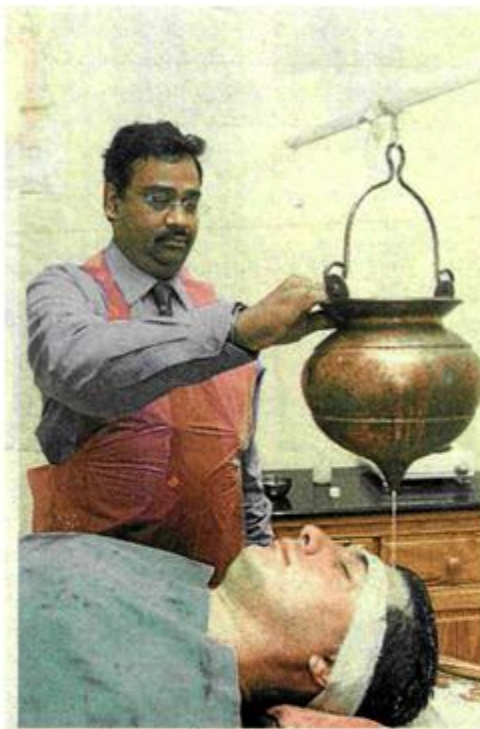
The Indian government, in conjunction with the DUT, is reviewing the CVs of expert candidates from India for the position.

"Since South Africa has ayurvedic patients across all race groups, it will be useful after some time that they have local practitioners. They can be taught to use local herbs to create medicines locally."

The first step of the process will be to establish a post-graduate diploma in ayurveda. Sharan said the establishment of an undergraduate qualification would begin once they had approval from the South African health and education departments.

DUT's international education and partnership specialist and management science lecturer Strini Pillay said signing the agreement was part of a process to establish courses — the first of their kind in South Africa — in ayurvedic medicine as part of the university's homeopathy faculty.

"There was a need for us to look (at this natural approach) considering we already offer homeopathy. This will allow staff members and even community members to become



A milk bath prepared with fresh flower petals

Top: Ayurvedic therapists demonstrate a massage called the Padha Abhyangam
Left: SA ayurvedic doctor Thiru Govender pours curd onto a patient's head

Picture: JACKIE CLAUSEN

they had been tested and approved by the relevant regulatory bodies and medical aids in South Africa.

"I don't think any medical aid covers that at present because we don't even cover other traditional medicines," he said.

Allied Health Professions Council of South Africa registrar Dr Louis Mullinder said ayurvedic practitioners

more aware of ayurveda. We're looking at a holistic approach."

Pillay said the proposed courses had attracted "a fair amount of interest" from staff at the faculty of health sciences.

Dr Rajen Cooppan, a medical doctor who trained in ayurveda in India, said the ancient medical system, based on the study of nature, enables people to take charge of their own health. He said it treated the cause of the problem rather than just the symptoms.

Cooppan said ayurveda was beneficial in that it was a holistic approach to medicine, incorporating both dietary and lifestyle changes.

Another medical practitioner, Dr Vasantha Naiker, who has been practising ayurvedic medicine for 30 years, said: "Ayurveda is natural so there are no side effects, whether

using plant remedies or mineral items. It is especially effective for chronic conditions such as asthma and diabetes and can be used for long periods of time."

Naiker said practitioners were taught how to prepare the remedies using over 2 000 species of plants.

"Medicines can be kept for long periods of time as we use no artificial preservatives, no colourants."

But the system has come under criticism from some quarters who claim that adding metals, minerals or gems to herbs can have adverse effects.

Naiker said practitioners needed thorough training to ensure proper safety.

Board of Health Care Funders managing director Humphrey Zokusa said medical aids would cover and pay for ayurvedic medicines and treatments if

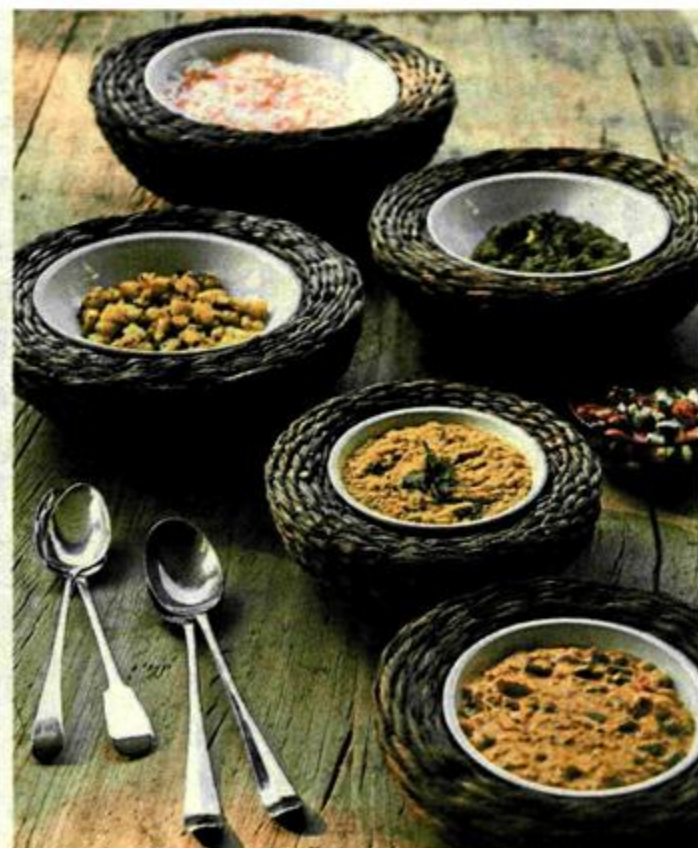


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were required by law to register with the council.

Only 14 ayurvedic practitioners are registered in South Africa.

They are required to prove they have completed a five-and-a-half-year Bachelor of Ayurvedic Medicine and Surgery degree from either Pakistan or India.



FOOD AS MEDICINE: Diet is an important aspect of ayurvedic treatment. Ingredients seen here are: paneer palak (Indian cheese in a creamy spinach sauce), channa masala (a tomato-based chickpea stew), alloo jeera and vegetarian curry