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Notable Notes

Skin Pores in Persian Medical Textbooks

"Skin pores" as an informal term is used for the outlet of "pilosebaceous units and sweat-producing glands." However, "traditional Persian medicine," as one of the branches of complementary medicine with roots that go back earlier than 8000 BC,¹ has fully described "skin pores/pores" with the special term of "masams."^{2,3} This rich school of traditional medicine believes that masams play an important role in the appearance of some symptoms and diseases and uses them in the management of many disorders.^{2,3}

Masams are very small natural pores or openings, especially in the skin surface near the hair follicles,² and also in other body organs (eg, the eyelids, eyes,² stomach, uterus, placenta, muscles, bones, joints²). Except for the eyelid's masams, which are considered to be the same as skin masams, they act as a pathway for exchange of materials in other body organs. These pores are divided into 2 groups, perceptible (visible) and imperceptible (conceptual or functional), and various functions are associated with them.^{2,3}

Persian medicine believes that respiration is one of the main responsibilities of skin and is performed basically by masams.³ Masams are also known as entrance pathways of materials, such as wind, steam, and foreign substances, and cause differences in the effects of medications by their selective penetration. They also play an important role in the excretion of waste materials by producing sweat, sebum, and hair.^{2,3} The production of sweat is also used as a main treatment strategy for fevers.² The role of masams in various conditions, such as opening, dilation, and porosity, and also opposite conditions, such as obstruction, closure, tightening, and condensation, has also been considered, because they cause differences in the penetration of materials,^{2,3} and, directly or indirectly, mediate in the manifestation of some symptoms. Masams are also mainly considered in the diagnosis and treatment of some diseases. Symptoms and diseases, such as alopecia, underweight disorder, infertility, and some types of fever, are caused by "obstruction or tightening" of masams. Conversely, "dilation" of masams causes diaphoresis, increase in body metabolism, and removal of material from the body. Many disorders, such as diarrhea, various fevers, hemorrhoids, skin eruptions, amenorrhea, and obesity, also are treated according to these alternations of masams.^{2,3}

It is consequential that long ago, great Persian physicians, without having advanced and modern instruments and only by observation of signs and symptoms, realized that specific factors (macroscopic, microscopic, and nanoscopic pores) are associated with the transpiration of materials. They used the term "masams" for all these factors (not only for pilosebaceous units and sweat glands) and diagnosed and treated many diseases almost perfectly with this method.

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