Efficiency of Nilavembu

What is the issue?

\n\n

\n
- Tamil Nadu with one of the worst dengue epidemics it has seen.
\n
- As part of its response, the government is freely distributing a herbal concoction called nilavembu kudineer.
\n

\n\n

What is nilavembu?

\n\n

\n
- One of the core ingredients of the niluvembu kudineer is andrographis paniculata (AP).
\n
- It is used in herbal medicine systems across South Asia.
\n
- It is recommended for fevers under the ancient Siddha system of medicine.
\n
- Even though there is no evidence of their efficacy, nilavembu along with other alternative remedies such as papaya-leaf juice and goat milk are used by many during epidemics.
\n

\n\n

Is it really effective?

\n\n

\n
- Some evidence exists for its potency against a range of illnesses.
\n
- AP is known to inhibit the dengue virus in animal cells in a laboratory, and to reduce symptoms of respiratory tract infections in small human trials.
\n

- But innumerable other herbal remedies also show such early promise.
  \n
- But only a tiny handful of these remedies go on to prove their efficacy in large-scale, placebo-controlled human trials.
  \n
- This is because the science of developing drugs from medicinal plants is complicated.
  \n
- Poly-herbal remedies like nilavembu are a mix of several compounds, while most of modern medicine relies on single-compounds.
  \n
- Plus, the amount of the active ingredient i.e the compound in a herb that acts against an illness, varies across plants.
  \n
- So drug makers have to find a way to identify this ingredient and test it in large- scale trials.
  \n
- This exercise requires not only massive financial investment but also intellectual honesty.
  \n

\n\n

What are the risks?

\n\n

\n
- As the studies are limited, the possible side-effects are not known completely.
  \n
- At the best Nilavembu can only be a supplement.
  \n
- But it is possible that people will misconstrue a supplement for a cure.
  \n
- The risk of patients who need medical attention, such as those with dengue haemorrhagic fever, opting for this drug instead of rushing to a hospital should not be underestimated.
  \n

\n\n

What should be done?

\n\n

\n
- While it is hard for government bodies to curb such practices, they must

never endorse them.
\n
- Unfortunately, too many attempts in India by the government to validate traditional medicine are driven less by honesty and more by blind faith.
\n
- e.g Last year the CSIR launched an anti-diabetic herbal pill called BGR-34 on the strength of what appeared to be very poor evidence.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: The Hindu

\n

