

THE HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HEALING

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"Many believe that a new central idea, a new philosophy, is needed for medicine to maintain its relevance to a broadened definition of health..."

We will start by looking at the predominant ideas in Western conventional medicine and where they originated. We will examine how ineffectiveness is increasingly leading scientists, researchers and the general population to look for new approaches to health and healing. Their work is often validating ancient practices by presenting scientific explanations for them. These findings suggest the need for transformation on many levels. We will look at the new ideas that are emerging, how they run contrary to conventional medical models and often hark back to ideas from the past. Finally, we will explore the possibility of a new philosophy that draws on both Eastern and Western traditions, and encompasses some of the new revelations of contemporary thinking.

In the beginning

We can find early footprints of the concept of healing among the first human beings, because illness is as old as life itself. Injuries would naturally have occurred in the physical, harsh day-to-day life of the first peoples. Wounds would have become infected and maybe sometimes people ate poisonous plants or toxic matter. It would have been only via experience and deductive reasoning that people became aware of which plants were healing and which were not. The forest provided their pharmacy, trial and error their knowledge of medicine and this must have been passed on to forthcoming generations.

When humans started to congregate in larger groups, the role of the healer became intertwined with general religious and spiritual functions. At this stage, we start to see the first 'heavenly' elements in the form of demons, spirits and gods that enter the healing equation. The ill man –then and equally now- wanted to get better and would do anything towards that end. He developed great trust and confidence in the healer as well as in the proven medicine tested by the past.

A profound belief took root in the human psyche that medicine with the help of supernatural powers would lead to cure. Shamans and priests appropriated this important facilitating role in helping connect people with the unearthly powers for the purpose of healing.

By feudal times, the Western world was explaining and interpreting almost all knowledge of nature and man through theological scripture and belief. The world was personal, purposeful and supernatural. While the religion of the day could be imposing, it lent structure and direction to people's lives through commonly held expectations and traditions.

However, power struggles, economic tension and plagues progressively planted seeds of doubt as to the likelihood, or even the possibility of divine intervention and salvation. This perhaps helped pave the way for a different and more divisive point of view to gain a foothold.

Descartes helped to split previously unified worldview into two. Copernicus's heliocentric theory also challenged the idea of a human centred universe and looked to the heavens for a planet rather than a god. The French philosopher put forward the notion that our minds are distinctly separate from the matter of our bodies. He cannot have known how extensively his worldview of separateness would influence millions of people's lives for centuries to come. Newtonian laws of motion furthered the division between the universe and man, whilst the lonely observer watched the soul slowly disappear from the body-machine.

Man was now no more than an evolutionary accident, a random, aimless being destined only to survive for as long as possible, alone, housed and imprisoned by the mortal coil. The work of Charles Darwin again degraded our sense of self-importance making us simply the manifestation of an evolutionary process. Freud completed the separation by applying the laws of mechanics to the domain of the living and the conscious.

Descartes considered that macro objects in space followed controlled, objective laws that are scientifically observable. By way of contrast, the human immaterial mind was too subjective to quantify, identify or measure, and therefore he classified it under religion. Descartes concluded that mind and matter were absolutely different aspects of reality and only matter could affect matter; the two were not to be combined. This all-embracing concept of mind and matter –Cartesian dualism – has dominated Europe and the West for four hundred years.

It was Bacon's view that the goal of science was to reign and control nature in order to become its master and superior. Isaac Newton provided mathematical equations for Descartes' dualism where the laws of matter were calculable and constant. Man and nature were viewed as mechanistic and their functions were explained in that context. Important ideas such as determinism and materialism explained that the universe operates according to

uniformed, impersonal laws of cause and effect, and the cosmos is made up of matter. This new science was to reduce objects to their elemental parts and to discover the cause-and-effect rules that govern them.

Western society has had a great influence on the world with its belief that the scientific method is the only valid way to knowledge, and its view of the universe as a mechanical system. Mind and matter do seem to be very different entities. A thinking mind has free will and acknowledges everything through conscious experience. Matter is value-free, inanimate, determined and objective. Dualism is one way to reconcile these seeming discrepancies.

Limitations

Classical scientific assumptions do not account for how mind-body interactions, biofeedback, or the placebo effect work. The history of modern medicine has been the search to find material objects that cause disease; however true cause can often be unseen and hard to distinguish from symptoms. Scientists have treated living organisms as machines leading to the misconception that the human body operates like clockwork. This has limited doctors in their understanding of disease.

If human beings are viewed as machines prone to failure unless fixed by doctors and medications, the body's inherent ability to heal itself is ignored. A major fault of modern medicine has been the lack of distinction between the disease process and the origins of the disease. Rather than finding the roots of the illness and trying to address the conditions that lead to it, doctors attempt to understand the biological mechanisms via which the illness operates and manifests in order to interfere with them.

Biologists and medical students have become mechanical students trained only to regard the body as a machine that works according to Newtonian laws. They learn how the mechanism operates, translate the signals and categorise them into chemical families or label them as particular malfunctions. The doctor's role is to intervene either chemically or physically to correct the malfunctioning of a specific mechanism.

Using prescription drugs to dampen the body's symptoms takes away our responsibility for and involvement in the state of illness. Conventional diagnosis puts disease into classified boxes so that most of the personal dimension is disregarded. By focusing on little atoms of the body, modern medicine often misses the patient as a whole, and by regarding health as a mechanical concept fails to give the patient a role to play in their own recovery, or to set illness within the broader context of general health. Capra states that '...although medicine has contributed to the elimination of certain diseases, this has not necessarily restored

health.’(1) Capra argues further that ‘..the relationship between medicine and health seems to be that biomedical interventions, although extremely helpful in individual emergencies, have very little effect on the health of entire populations.’(2) The developments in medical technology, new procedures and diagnostic tools have further shifted attention from the patient to the disease.

Part of the dissatisfaction with medical practices arises from the fact that cost does not seem proportionate to effectiveness. In addition, the overall health of the population has not become better in comparison with the supposed advancement in scientific and technological innovation. Waiting times and small amounts of actual contact time often make people feel uncared for by an impersonal approach.

Modern medicine is no longer about health. It is an industry that does not duly consider vitally important aspects of well-being, like how stress impacts the immune system, how processed foods, alcohol, excessive calories and insufficient exercise are recipes for disease. How exposure to the tens of thousands of toxins in our environment and in our food supply have direct links to the illness we suffer. It is a for-profit, disease industry that can only survive and prosper if millions of people continue to get sick, and stay that way. Deceptive and manipulative marketing has helped change our eating patterns, so that now more than 80% of the money people spend on food is for highly processed, unhealthy foods low in nutrient value. Toxic medications will never reverse poor health that is due primarily to ill advised and considered lifestyle choices.

The billions of dollars spent on alternative therapists, faith healers and natural remedies reflects a deep dissatisfaction among people who are desperately seeking cures that modern medicine is not providing.

The conventional healing profession largely rejects three thousand years of accumulated Eastern medicine and learning as unscientific is surprising. Simultaneously, it has such statistics as the 300,000 deaths a year in the United States due to adverse reactions to prescription drugs is staggering. (3)

The reality is that the body produces its own best pharmacy complete with painkillers, antibiotics, disinfectants and anti-inflammatories; these are far better than any manufactured drugs. The body’s know-how directs a dosage that is always correct and produces no side effects. This intelligence is present in every body and greater than any outside alternative. It supersedes the matter of the body, as without it matter would be disharmonious and chaotic. Our natural self-healing response has evolved over millennia; it is uniquely sensitive and empathetic.

New Ideas

'The Universe is far more complex and coherent than anyone other than poets and mystics have dared to imagine.' (4) We now recognize that what we thought of as the boundaries of the Universe are not really its limits and that the cosmos is far vaster than we thought. Einstein's theories concerning the nature of matter and energy opened up new frontiers by extending the horizon of our understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. His greatest achievement of unifying energy and matter has led to a giant leap towards comprehending a different nature of reality.

Einstein's perception of light changed when in the early 1900s physicists realised that light can be in both wave *and* particle form. Quantum physics suggested that light behaved in a particular way because of the person observing the phenomenon. Scientists also noted that tiny particles seemed to behave differently when observed and concluded that the behaviour of energy and matter was subjective rather than absolute.

This new idea amalgamated mind and matter to end separateness for good. The theory claimed that the mind of the observer was principal to understanding the nature of reality. The more powerful the mind's intention, the more influence it had on the physical world. Simply when we change our mind, we change our life as our personal reality mirrors our personality. 'when we can trust ourselves, our mind, and the quantum field of infinite potentials, we are freed from our primitive "survival" state of mind'.(5)

Quantum physics didn't offer all the answers scientists wanted to have clarification on so they investigated further to satisfy their intellectual hunger. They found what appeared to be one immense quantum field –The Zero Point Field – providing a connection between everything in the Universe and us, a sea of vibrating energy via which information is exchanged. The idea of the Zero Point Field seemed to explain how cells communicate, how the life energy is vibrating through the cosmos proving that we were not just simple casualty of nature.

It is well documented how 'primitive' peoples are able to communicate via transpersonal connections. It appears, that their minds are linked so that they can inform each other even beyond the range of sensory limitations. Australian Aborigines are able to 'read' the earth, find water sources and tap into an information field, which tells them about far away events. Most scientists believe that the brain by some means generates consciousness. However

there many thinkers to suggest that the brain simply receives and transmits a more universal sense of conscious energy.

'When people realize that the age-old intuition that space does not separate things but links them has a bona fide scientific explanation, the genius for innovation inherent in modern civilization will find ways to make practical use for it.'(6)

These ideas shake the conventional worldview and laws of biology and physics. If everything is interconnected and always has been, the implications for how we have traditionally viewed our relation with the world could be changed forever. Understanding these types of possibilities requires an expanded view of human consciousness.

Thoughts that matter

'...science declared that we are physical machines that have somehow learned to think. Now it dawns that we are thoughts that have learned to create a physical matter.'(7)

People want to believe that they are more than just machines despite powerful reasoning presented by science. 'Although medicine has spent several centuries trying to hold on to the idea that the body runs itself alone, like a self-motivated machine, there must be a driver here, too. Otherwise, our body's chemistry would be a jumble of floating molecules instead of the incredibly ordered and precise machinery that it so obviously is.'(8)

It seems that the main problem when considering modern medicine and its relationship with people is that something vital is left out of today's medicament – the human mind and its capacity in healing. Scientist-philosopher David Darling states that 'the idea that the mind is a fundamental, all-pervasive property of the universe lies at the heart of mystical traditions stretching back over 2,000years.' The ancient Greeks postulated that the action of the mind on the body was a local event, whereas the Persians viewed the mind-body connection as non-local. They believed that the mind was not limited to the body but existed beyond the body. Ancient healers of the East believed that the body is created out of consciousness. Their way of treating disease was complex and holistic aiming to mobilise the mind to affect the body's matter. Conventional doctors consider sudden recoveries from advanced cancer as miraculous whereas perhaps they are clear proofs that the mind can go deep enough to create life-preserving change in the body. Deepak Chopra argues that we undervalue our consciousness as a real force. 'The reason why not everyone manages to take the healing process as far as it can go is that we differ drastically in our ability to mobilize it.'(9)

To manage our health through daily exercise, low fat food, rejection of alcohol and tobacco lacks one vital element - our emotional self-care. We are reminded to look after the physical aspects of keeping well but our spirits and souls need equal attention. Doctors rarely touch on the subject of spirituality as it is hard to describe and harder to research. Perhaps they also consider that it is beyond their professional remit? Also, people tend to relate spirituality to organized religion that has often divided and created disagreements. However, if spirituality is about a profound search for meaning in our lives, it is something that embraces us all in an equal and unifying way. Prayer and spiritual healing coupled with other intention-based practices can produce actual effects on people despite the fact that conventional science has no explanation for them.

Alternative practitioners seem to accept more readily that healing is connected to consciousness, whereas medical doctors comprehend this concept more as an automatic occurrence and response.

For many centuries people have spoken about profound personal experiences, which in modern times tend to be translated as 'psychic' observations. The recurrence of this phenomenon throughout history indicates that there is an ethereal interconnection between people and objects that transcends the 'known' limitations of time and space. Many believe in such a concept via personal experience, many dismiss them as unjustified claims despite the fact 'that science deals with hypotheses, theories and models, and not with absolutes.'⁽¹⁰⁾ Science is one expression of a society's contemporary thinking and just like other aspects, evolves. Certain events will be explained after systematic experimentation and analysis to a point that results in satisfactory scientific proof.

Mainstream scientific acceptance of psychic phenomena is long overdue. There are many evaluations and explorations that demonstrate psychic healing. Theologians and priests might consider these instances as examples of 'divine intervention'. However, a point of difference may occur when identifying the source of the 'divine'? Philosophers and scientists are also challenged by such events to reconsider the role of consciousness and to devise new experiments in order to better understand 'miracles'. The divide between objective and subjective has led to a growing dislike and distrust of science. As science has provided a better understanding of galaxies and the workings of genes, could it not also interpret experiences conveyed by mystics? As astronaut Edgar Mitchell stated: 'There are no unnatural or supernatural phenomena, only very large gaps in our knowledge of what is natural, particularly regarding relatively rare occurrences.'⁽¹¹⁾

Neuro-scientific research has shown that thoughts produce chemical reactions in the brain and therefore our thoughts have a physical effect on our physical body. Not only does

thought matter to the way in which we live our lives, but also our thoughts actually become *matter* inside of our bodies.

Research on the placebo effect concludes that belief affects biology. From this premise we could start to work towards a more comprehensive treatment approach that incorporates a greater awareness of emotional and psychological factors. Clinical trials often discard the meaningful impact of the placebo effect, although in the past some healing was achieved through such practices as bloodletting and the use of 'snake oils'. 'Shocking' results of recovery without drug intervention pose a threat to modern medicine that clearly shakes the central beliefs of their profession. 'Belief is a powerful force. Belief makes a sugar pill a powerful medicine. Belief can enable or diminish the human potential.'(12)

Confirming the age-old Eastern philosophy that mind and body are one, recent research has acknowledged how biochemicals in our body act as the messengers of our emotions and beliefs. 'Recent technological innovations have allowed us to examine the molecular basis of the emotions, and to begin to understand how the molecules of our emotions share intimate connections with, and are indeed inseparable from, our physiology. It is the emotions, I have come to see, that link mind and body.'(13)

Candace Pert argues that we are responsible - consciously or unconsciously - for the way we feel and thus are unavoidably responsible for affecting our physiology always and throughout our lives, as we can never switch emotions off. The external world is a mirror reflecting our beliefs and expectations and affects every aspect of our lives, both in health and sickness. A body that thinks is very different to the one that medicine treats. It is a body that perceives what is happening to it, not only through the brain but also across every cell.

By intensifying a specific intention we can direct our lives to a healthier, fuller state where the use of any drugs may be unnecessary. In light of this, we need to be mindful of our thoughts as they can affect not just our lives but also the world around us. Negative thoughts can have harmful outcomes and this is depicted clearly in some culture's use of curses and spells, such as voodoo. Specifically intentioned negative thoughts can be employed for positive ends however, such as the *killing off* of cancerous cells; for the patient to heal, the *enemy* has to die. The oncologist Carl Simonton modified this approach in guided meditation with cancer patients as he applied the concept of *befriending* the cancer cells achieved better results.

However, the most effective approach may not always be to attempt to eradicate the core of the illness, but to step aside and let a higher intelligence take over and re-establish order.

'The mind continues affecting its surroundings whether or not we are consciously sending an intention. To think is to affect.' (14)

Buddhist monks have been studied in an attempt to find out how they are able to control and master metabolic rate, heart rate and other aspects of their physiology through meditation and the power of their thoughts. Meditation in this context would seem to help focus and amplify the intensity of specific intentions. Meditation can also be used as a technique to initiate healing by a surrendering and letting go of the self and of the outcome. In this instance there is not a specific intention but rather the removal of obstacles to healing that may arise from the over conscious controlling mind.

Muhammed Ali was a perfect example of the excellent use of intention. The boxer employed an array of mental skills to improve his performance to perfection in order to achieve his desired goal. That a specific psychology can affect physiology and event outcome is proved and used successfully by athletes on a regular basis.

Researchers have illustrated that hypnosis, being a sort of imposed intention that instructs the receptive brain, can help alter lifestyle choices long term that may result in improved body shape, cessation of smoking, drugs, alcohol and other patient desired outcomes. As with meditation, it can also be used in a less directed manner in order to speed recovery time and reduce reliance on invasive drug therapy. Hypnosis in either case evidently shows the power of direct thought. Visualisation can help post surgical and cancer recovery. 'Our bodies do not distinguish between a chemical process and the *thought* of a chemical process'. (15) 'Indeed, a recent analysis of 46,000 heart patients, half of whom were taking a placebo, made the astonishing discovery that patients taking the placebo fared as well as those on the heart drug.' (16)

'Modern medicine must fully appreciate the central role of intention in healing. Repeatedly, the mind has proved to be a far more powerful healer than the greatest of breakthrough drugs.'(17)

Many ancient and alternative healing practices use 'subtle' energy – *prana* for Hindus, *chi* for the Chinese – in the restoration of health. This perplexing energy can be considered the free flow of information conveyed by the biochemicals of emotions. Most cultures acknowledge the significance of emotional energy release in healing, but it is not given official recognition in the conventional western tradition.

'Subtle' energy is a more efficient means to affect matter than manufactured chemicals. It is perhaps important to note that the denial of the power of the mind in healing by medicine

has not just been the result of dogmatic thinking, but has had a financial dimension as well. If the mind can heal why should anybody go to a doctor let alone pay for drugs? ` If we could work out the science of medicine that treats human energy levels and the exact nature of the `energy` that was being treated, the possibilities for improved health were unimaginable.`(18)

In the End

Though this may be partly true, a disease cannot possess a host who will not accept it. Ayurveda, and several other healing practices operate on the premise that one treats the patient first and the disease second. Illness implies that there is a conflict going on. According to Ayurveda it is a battle from inside of the body rather than outside influences causing it. `The vital issue is not how to win the war but how to keep peace in the first place.`(19)

Possible remedies can be found at the deeper level of consciousness. Knowing that the body has wisdom, a new kind of responsibility is required from people. We are no more dumb machines to be fixed by the mechanic – the doctor. We have the ability to facilitate our own healing and perhaps no choice not to be involved at all. Whether it is energy healing, prayer, psi contact or other methods or medicine, people and practitioners want only what works.

An increasing number of scientists feel that we are in the middle of a scientific revolution, an extensive paradigm shift with great consequences for how we deal with disease and health. Dualism is being absorbed into a more holistic realm. `However, I truly believe that only when Spirit and Science are reunited will we be afforded the means to create a better world.`(20)

Future experiments and research will confirm that energy healing (distant healing, prayer, etc) is not just real but certainly achieves treatments of certain if not all physical and mental illnesses. It is probable to see in the near future that medical groups will show increased interest in the therapeutic effects of psychic based healing. By understanding more of the factors governing energy healing, we will see new specialities forming within medicine. According to neuropsychiatrist, Dr Peter Fenwick, mentioned in a lecture at UWL in 2005, that young doctors taking courses at the Royal Society are insisting on to be taught `Spiritual Medicine`.

Fritjof Capra argues optimistically that individuals, governments, and institutions are changing on a universal scale reaching an irreversible turning point. This transformation will require us to re-examine our values, reject those models that have outlived their usefulness and welcome once again abandoned concepts.

Larry Dossey observes that contemporary perspectives toward consciousness in healing are too conventional. He feels that mind-body medicine has become 'my mind, my 'body' medicine. It lacks the belief that we have the ability through our consciousness to affect our body. It lacks a mindfulness of the consciousness of all things around us. Empirical discoveries now show that the nonsentient universe reacts to human emotions and thoughts; consequently it cannot be as unanimated or inactive as we have previously assumed.

Illness is not solely an individual issue but also a consequence of the distortion of society as a whole. Great human conflicts are started and inflamed by the arrogant, misplaced belief in uniqueness and superiority of an exceptional race, religion or political system, and the individuals that are composing it. Without an understanding of our implicit unity with all things, without humility and altruism, humanity becomes reduced to a group of selfish, intolerant beings. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we are connected non-locally and we constantly impact each other. We need to heal the wounded soul for the incidence of illness to decline.

'For more than 99 percent of human history, the world was enchanted and man saw himself as an integral part of it. The complete reversal of this perception in a mere four hundred years or so has destroyed the continuity of the human experience and the integrity of the human psyche. It has nearly wrecked the planet as well. The only hope, or so it seems to me, lies in a re-enchantment of the world.'(21)

In conclusion, it is important to 'realise that the final common pathway for the way that all medical systems work is by their ability to influence the body to heal itself, to mobilize inner resources, and to address the energetic, as well as material, aspects of a living human organism.' (22)

New research into consciousness and quantum connectedness all point to a range and scope of human potential, which all too often defies our present imaginings. Both healer and patient need to become more aware and accepting of this potential. 'Learning allows us to change; evolution allows us to transmute our genes. Learning takes place when nature is nurtured, evolution happens when what is nurtured gives back to nature. This is the cycle of life.'(23)

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