

Mind-Body Medicine and Mind-Body Healing

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The Healing Equation

Healing can be regarded as an equation. On one side of the equation are the forces that may generate or contribute to an illness. On the other side are the external resources of medical science together with the body's internal healing abilities. Natural medicine has developed various modalities as to how to enhance the 'healing from within', be it through nutrition, acupuncture, hydrotherapy, fasting, herbs, touch or homeopathic remedies. Mind-body medicine^{1,2,3} is now expanding the picture of what true holistic medicine can be like: incorporating patients' emotions, images, thoughts, awareness and belief as powerful agents in the healing process.

Current Research

It is beyond the scope of this article to summarize the complete body of knowledge and science of psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) and mind-body research. However, some of the main themes that have influenced my own mind-body practice include:

1. Hans Selye's work on the stress response^{4,5} and the whole art of stress assessment and stress reduction;
2. Ader's⁶ discovery of conditioned immunosuppressive response and the deep significance of the mind and the immune system communicating and interacting;
3. Benson's research on 'The Relaxation Response'⁷⁻¹⁷, showing that we can actively evoke a healing experience to influence and enhance health;
4. Kiecolt Glaser's investigations^{18,19,20} of psychosocial factors and their effect on immune cells and immuno-competence;
5. The significant field of placebo research²¹ showing the power of the biological outcomes of belief, trust and faith;
6. The field of psycho-oncology. The pioneering empirical and clinical work, albeit not always fully scientific, of Simonton²², LeShan²³ and Siegel²⁴ and the important research work of Spiegel^{25,26,27} and Fawzy^{28,29,30};
7. The role of personality, lifestyle, stress and emotions in cardiovascular disease (CVD)^{32,33}. The role of hostility and one's relationship with anger in healing the heart^{34,35,36,37};

8. The work of Dean Ornish^{38,39,40} reversing CVD through holistic multilevel intervention, combining group work, stress reduction, nutrition, exercise, meditation, yoga and community;
9. The new developments in positive psychology, with the publications of Kobassa^{41,42,43}, Antonovsky^{44,45} and Seligman^{46,47,48,49} emphasizing the role of commitment, sense of control, relating to life's difficulties as a challenge and finding meaning in times of adversity, and the impact they have in health, longevity and survivability;
10. The field of meditation^{50,51}, mindfulness⁵²⁻⁵⁹ and guided meditations⁶⁰, and the profound contribution of Buddhist psychology to health psychology and to Western holistic medicine⁶¹;
11. The beauty and power of guided imagery in clinical practice, in working with illness, pain and dark emotions, and in evoking and creating health^{62,63,64,65};
12. The inspirations in numerous articles and books of holistic thinkers and doctors, such as Larry Dossey MD⁶⁶ or Naomi Remen MD⁶⁷.

The Five Phases of Therapy

A relatively easy and working model for clinical practice can be used through the Five Level Star, with each pole representing one aspect of the whole: physical, emotions, cognitions, behavior and spirituality. Each pole brings unique inquiry, assessments, teachings, advices, therapies and techniques, and the whole is always larger than the sum of its parts.

1. **The physical:** pathology and symptoms, medications, supplements, nutrition, relaxation/tension levels, pain picture, the 'energy body', and connectedness to one's body.
2. **The emotional:** anxiety-stress level, anger-fear-grief vs. joy-love-openness-trust, expression of feelings, the experience of illness, amount of love (received/given), satisfaction, helplessness scale, sense of worth, connectedness to others.
3. **The cognitive:** assessment of one's thoughts, memories, self-image, inner dialogues, cognition, inner metaphors and images, dreams, ideas, expectations, beliefs.
4. **Behavioral aspects:** choices, habits, lifestyle, nutrition, exercise, compulsions and addictive behaviors, expression of needs, abilities to ask for help, setting boundaries.
5. **Spiritual aspects:** belief system, sense of meaning, god, spiritual practices, existential search, spiritual community, relationship with life and with being alive.

Clinical Perspectives

The new perspectives, tools, techniques and insights are presenting therapeutic challenges on various levels:

1. The intake – asking the 'right' questions, seeing the whole picture, making the 'right' connections.
2. The nature of the therapy – symptom and acute work, chronic work, prevention work, spiritual work, holistic work.
3. Using and integrating the techniques – meditation, empathic dialogue, relaxation, guided imagery, cognitive restructuring, touch, breath-work and more.
4. The doctor as teacher – teaching the skills of relaxation, meditation, positive thinking, open dialogue, creative expression of feeling and needs. Encouraging the awareness, participation and responsibility of the patient as an important factor in the healing process.
5. Enhancing the doctor-patient relationship through the qualities of empathy, non-judgment, trust, unconditional presence, compassion, patience and sensitivity.
6. Finding the 'middle way': Doing vs. Being, reducing the symptom vs. 'enlarging' the patient-person, and Curing vs. Healing.

Some Quotes to Consider

- Perhaps healthy people are people who use their capacity to transform their experience, in order to influence their existence ... The calamities and difficulties of daily life may then serve us as a way to get clearer about who we are and how we want to live.

Rachel Naomi Remen MD, A Healthy Way to Have a Disease

- Our disease may tell us a story not just of our cells but of ourselves. By taking the risk of listening, we may be led to the emotions, both 'positive' and 'negative', that lie at the core of our authentic being.

Marc Ian Barash, The Healing Path

- The human body may lack the capacity to gain a new part when one is lost, but the person has it. If suffering occurs when there is a threat to one's integrity or a loss of a part of the person, then suffering will continue if the person cannot be made whole again.

Eric Kasel MD, The Nature of Suffering and the Role of Medicine

- Curing happens at the level of the body, and it requires expertise. Healing is what happens at the level of the whole person, and it requires collaboration with the innate movement towards wholeness, which is constant and present in everyone.

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