



# Integrated Holistic Healing

## A New Approach for Positive Health and Well Being



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Despite vast advances in medical science, we are witnessing a profound crisis in health care. Many reasons are being given for the widespread dissatisfaction: inadequate infrastructure, inaccessibility and delay of service, lack of sympathy and dedication in health-care professionals, malpractice, etc. to name a few. However, increasing evidence suggests the short comings of the present health care system as being rooted in the conceptual framework that supports medical theory and practice and I believe that the crisis will persist unless the framework is changed. Hence the very concept of health and healing needs to be redefined. Even WHO, the body which formulates world wide health policies, says that *"Health is not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, but a state of perfect physical, mental and social well being"*. Now, if you observe carefully the emphasis is on well being, which in turn is defined *"As a state that transcends the limitations of body, space, time and circumstances and in which one is at peace with oneself and with others"*. In other words there should be complete harmony between mind, body and spirit and between the individual and society. Therefore a fourth dimension i. e. a *"Spiritual"* aspect is also being acknowledged. Going by this definition can one honestly tell how many of us are actually healthy? According to

a latest WHO consensus - heart disease, stress/strain and depression etc. will overtake infectious diseases to become the world's leading causes of death and disability by the year 2020. Even now, the American Institute of Stress estimates that 75% to 95% of all visits to doctors are result of reaction to stress. These findings very clearly reveal that a crucial aspect of health and disease has been ignored. Moreover people too seem unaware, otherwise why would such problems be on the rise?

Now the big question is how have we humans arrived at such a dismal state. Let me be frank in saying through sheer ignorance, because for years man has been taken and treated as a machine due to the *"Newtonian-Cartesian"* model and the classical physics view (now changed because of new insight through quantum physics) which results in separation of man from nature, mind from matter and the eternal from temporal. This in turn leads to total inner chaos further resulting in tensions, stress and all kinds of problems. Therefore the cause of human suffering lies to a large extent within man himself. It does not mean to say that external factors are not important or do not play any part, but since environment too is an indirect reflection of man's inner conflicts and state, therefore the greatest of *"disease-health"* wars are not only to be fought in the battle fields of the external

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physical world but also in the minds of the people, because what determines our becoming disabled is not simply the severity of our illness or injury, it is also how we perceive ourselves and our condition (1). In other words, the very approach that human beings are machines and should be treated as such is totally wrong. Are we mere machines? Certainly not. But over the years we have been treated as such, for example: emphasis has only been over a particular part of the human body which seems to be diseased but the person as a whole has been ignored altogether, and worst of all the approach over the years has narrowed on smaller and smaller areas of the body - from bodily organs to that of cells and finally to molecules and every major and minor disease is analyzed in this way. This reductionist attitude also leads to a mania for specialists, as no longer a single entity, the body demands an expert in each specific system. What the technology of medicine gains by this approach, unfortunately the art of healing loses because no one focuses on the whole being.

But this version is incomplete, as today we have been forced to accept that human health is more complex than can be accounted for by molecular behaviour, for today if one analyzes correctly it is impossible to think of any disease that is causally as simple as we once supposed. Even infectious diseases which were once believed to be the result of a straight forward balance between the infective agent and the defence of the host is not entirely true, otherwise why some persons when exposed to the same agent develop disease whereas others become carriers and the rest have no problems? Furthermore why do cancer patients with positive attitudes live longer than their weak minded counterparts? Why does a poor degree of job satisfaction rate as a major factor in the development of heart attacks and why does the

psychological make up of a person influence the outcome of disease? Why do ailing politicians show a remarkable recovery on coming to power? Last but not the least, why do majority of similar illnesses behave differently in different patients? The answer to all these is simple, if one looks carefully and that is what has been termed as the "individual human factor" which is the sum total of a person's emotions, hopes, fears, desires, likes, dislikes, worries, feelings, etc. In other words, the personality which naturally differs from person to person and on this personality or persona of an individual depends his/her outlook and attitude to all events including origin and outcome of disease. But since all this may not be visible to the naked eye it is ignored whereas paradoxically this aspect is much more important than focussing on bodily health alone.

The term "healing" means to make whole and to heal is to restore balance and integrity to our being. The body in fact has a wonderful innate capacity to heal itself. Healing is a natural property of life and life itself is a continuous process of healing. However, conventional medicine has a non-holistic approach to healing. Generally, it treats from the outside, using methods such as drugs, surgery and radiation etc. *This is not to suggest that modern medicine should be totally ignored. On the other hand it has over the years helped save innumerable lives and continues to do so, especially through emergency care but we need to understand its limitations, especially in relation to chronic conditions where it is less effective or not effective at all.* On the other hand the patient may be exposed to many side effects by long term treatment and secondly the disease process may actually be strengthened over time by suppressive drugs. Suppressives measures can actually drive the disease process inwards and affect the body's vital organs. For

example patients who take steroids for long periods to control arthritis, asthma, lupus, etc. commonly experience weight gain, peptic ulcerations, weakened muscles and bones, moreover, they also have a recurrence of symptoms when they stop using these drugs. Hippocrates stated "First do no harm" (primam non nocere) and also "Honor the healing power of nature" (vis medicatrix naturae) but in its treatment of many chronic diseases conventional medicine alone has failed on both accounts.

Most of present day chronic problems which cause immense suffering are what can be termed as "*life style related, modifiable disorders*". Notably amongst them are hypertension, diabetes, coronary artery disease, peptic ulcers and digestive problems, asthma, arthritis and other degenerative diseases etc. As the name suggests one can get appreciable relief by changing the lifestyle to a more natural and harmonious one, or better still try to prevent them, by leading a harmonious life style in the first place.

Interestingly the word "Doctor" comes from the Latin word for "Teacher": docere. The primary concern of a doctor should also be to teach the prevention of illness as it is far easier, wiser and less costly than treating the disease once it occurs, hence the saying "Prevention is better than Cure". It was estimated that world wide sales of drugs for the year 1998 were to the tune of \$ 308 billion, out of which majority were for anti-ulcers, anti-depressants, cholesterol reducers and anti hypertensives. Now all of the above are for conditions which can be rectified/modified by a change of life style or prevented to begin with and even if there is a marginal reduction in the consumption of drugs, imagine the amount of money saved. Traditional medicine on the other hand stresses more on the treatment of disease rather than the

maintenance of health and prevention of illness. The biomedical model is the basis of conventional medicine and the emphasis is placed on form rather than function, whereas the body's natural healing system is based on function rather than on form or structure alone. The biomedical model ignores the importance of the mind and our psychological make-up (individual human factor). Instead it focuses on localized physical (organic) causes of disease, forgetting that the body as a whole and all of its parts are connected. The body's organs and systems are dependent on each other, in addition our emotional states and energy are linked to our physical self. Therefore, what we believe about our own health is a powerful predictor of how long we will live, in fact it predicts our longevity more accurately than do clinical assessments based on physical examinations and laboratory tests (2).

In view of such evidence a new branch "Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI)" has come up. This term describes the combined disciplines of psychology, neurophysiology, endocrinology and immunology and was coined by psychologist Robert Ader to describe how the mind, the immune system, and the nervous system all respond to disease. The main goal of this branch is to understand and explore the concept of attitude vis a vis health. Part of PNI's quest is to call forth the biology of hope through an appreciation of the healing powers of the human spirit, plus a deeper understanding of the intimate neuronal and hormonal bonds between the mind and body. Social psychologists, experimental psychologists, psychiatrists, biologists, oncologists and epidemiologists, among other specialists, have all contributed to PNI research. Recent medical research has now even verified the efficacy of prayers in healing.



The solution therefore lies in an integrated holistic approach i.e. in not only treating the body but also the mind and spirit. Moreover the goal of life style modifications and other such programmes is not just to make you live longer - although you will likely do so, after all none of us is going to live forever, and who wants to live longer if you are not enjoying life? The goal is to make you feel better. You can begin enjoying life more, with less stress, more joy, better health and greater peace. Support for such an approach is now coming from many quarters, and especially in a key area, that of ischaemic heart disease where studies and experiments have been successfully carried out in reversing the disease process by a holistic approach and numerous patients have not only been benefited but have also been saved from being subjected to unnecessary invasive procedures and treatment methodologies thereby saving both expenditure and time. The heart is a prime example of how our body is affected by our mind. It is both a pump and an organ deeply influenced by emotion. Hostility, cynicism, pessimism, depression and

*heart of the heart and the cardiovascular system (3).*

Pioneering work in this was accomplished by Dr. Dean Ornish, whose emphasis on proper diet, exercise, meditation and stress management techniques has brought him wide international acclaim. His research has been published in leading medical journals, and also featured in virtually all major media. Others too are incorporating an integrated holistic approach in treating and preventing not only heart disease but various other disorders, notably amongst them are Dr. Thomas Corson at the John Hopkins Medical Institute, Dr. Herbert Benson at the Harvard School Of Medicine, Dr. Jack Sarno at New York University Medical Centre. So also

Dr. Dale Matthews, Dr. Larry Dossey, Dr. Bernie Segal, Dr. Deepak Chopra and a host of others, all leading and internationally recognized doctors, support, practice and vouch for such an approach. In India too, a number of conventional practitioners have successfully adopted this concept. However, such an approach requires a better rapport between patient and doctor. The art of medicine lies in a skillful manipulation of the relationship between doctor and patient which when combined with the logical use of medical science, leads to the best kind of patient care. But before that the treating physicians and the general population have to be made aware of this aspect, hence it is essential that such knowledge and training be imparted right at the under graduate/ post graduate levels. This would have a dual benefit, not only in making one a better healer but also in improving the doctor's own well being. *Apart from proper diet and exercise other holistic ways employed for improving the health of the body-mind complex include yoga, meditation, visualizations, counselling, occupational therapy, techniques for stress reduction, hypnosis, positive affirmations, prayers, opening one's heart to a higher self, or tuning into something larger than one's own limited and isolated individuality and energy healing methods.*

The crux of the matter lies therefore in a change of perception and outlook and this in turn would be in tune with true healing as compared to mere relief, because it has now been well recognized that it is not only the illness or the disease which is the problem but also our feeling and attitude towards it, because belief affects biology, sometimes very strongly and the power of belief to influence our physical health is well established (4,5). Long ago, Plato had correctly remarked "If you want to heal the body, then first heal the mind". Moreover



traditionally western culture has viewed pain and illness as negative and destructive but in reality with proper understanding they may be taken as great opportunities as they actually indicate that the "body - mind complex" is out of balance due to wrong *lifestyle or attitudes* and is just crying out for help. In fact there is always hidden positivity in an apparent negative situation - this is also called the "Kogel effect". Joe Kogel, a friend of world renowned holistic healer Dr. Bernie Segal had a malignant melanoma and who by an integrated holistic approach not only got cured but as a result his entire attitude towards life changed for the better. He said, "*the worst things in life have within them the seeds of the best*", we have only to possess the insight, willingness and get proper guidance to look for and act upon them. It has also been rightly said that "*Some of the most exciting opportunities of our lives come cleverly disguised as insolvable difficulties*". It is therefore imperative to have a proper perspective because the more strongly we believe something good or bad the more effect there will be on our physiological process (6).

Hence, if carefully observed, we can see that pain and illness are directly connected to energy blockages due to disharmony but if we have chronic pain and think ourselves as disabled because of it we will experience greater pain and disability (7,8). Therefore, being well or well being starts with expanding our consciousness, our way of seeing and understanding. Pain and illness can either awaken us into proper insight or blind us to all but our suffering. Even long term suffering may end when we understand what our inner health is and where

to find it. Actually we are out of alignment within ourselves and our surroundings in some way and by paying attention to what and where it is occurring, we can gain valuable insights into what is causing this imbalance and when we listen to our 'body-mind complex' and help correct the imbalances at all levels we not only heal very quickly but also improve the overall quality of our lives. This then in essence is what is termed as *Integrated Holistic Healing* i.e. healing from within and without, which not only gives relief from the illness but in the process makes the person a better human being who leads a more peaceful and enjoyable life.

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