

Why Do You Think You Are Ill? - The Role of Emotions in Illness and Healing

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Whether looking at chronic fatigue, cancer, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, hypertension, gut issues, or some other disease there is always a reason as to why a person is manifesting a particular condition. Yes, you can argue it might be genetic, but does the genetic aspect of a disease, if there is one, always manifest and how does lifestyle, stress levels and life experiences affect what the body manifests?

Traditional approaches, such as Naturopathy, Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Homeopathy, Kinesiology and Osteopathy consider the whole person, the approach treats the person, not the disease state or condition, whereas conventional medicine, treats the disease condition, often disregarding lifestyle, nutrition, experiences, such as trauma in earlier and later life and levels of stress as well as the body being a complex adaptive system interconnected within other complex systems such as family or society and that disease or illness can be situated across several interconnecting levels.

In the western world we consider "Illness is a person with a disease." Perhaps this should be looked at in the opposite way - "A disease with a person"? Maimonides, the 12th-century physician-philosopher is cited as saying, "*The physician should not treat the disease, but the patient who is suffering from it*".

Historically going back to BC, Egyptians, Greeks, Arabic nations, as well as India and China considered illness as something to do with evil spirits or living out of balance with nature, thus creating an imbalance resulting in physical manifestation. It was Hippocrates who said, "It is more important to know what sort of person has a disease than to know what sort of disease a person has". Overtime, traditional medicine approaches were pushed aside initially by religious figures in society who slowly disregarded traditional methods by taking the key healing role in communities. As time went on early medicine of what we know today through the work of surgeons and predominantly male doctors took on the "healing" role further distancing usually female, local knowledge and treatment approaches.

Today modern conventional medicine thinks primarily about the disease condition and the part of the body that it affects and

then treats accordingly whether through surgery, medications or a combination of approaches. My question: how can treatment be effective when not considering:

1. The whole system within the human anatomy, including all individual systems – nervous, digestive, muscular skeletal etc as influencing each other rather than working in isolation?
2. The emotional and spiritual as well as the physical aspects of the disease condition in relation to the person, therefore treating holistically?

Humans as for other living beings are energetic bodies. Energy is moving all the time except when there are blockages. Aspects of life that might cause these blockages include, but is not limited to:

- Emotional/physical trauma
- Nutrient dead diet, large percentage of ultra processed foods
- Lack of or poor sleep
- Sedentary lifestyle and lack of movement
- Prescription and non-prescription drugs
- Lack of love, joy, social belonging, tribe

If we are unable to process emotions effectively and appropriately, they have a large impact on manifestation of a particular disease state or condition, as well as impacting the healing process (Levenson, 2019.) Can we change someone's journey through traditional and holistic healing approaches? No, only the person can change their journey, but we can certainly make the client more aware of patterns of behaviour that are not serving them, emotions that have lodged in the muscle memory and then to share approaches and techniques on how to release these emotions to enable healing as well as to change the pattern that does not serve.

We have something like well over 200 emotions, however the cardinal negative emotions play an enormous role in being healthy and staying well. These emotions include anger, rage, shame, guilt, fear and grief. Every emotion is connected to an organ for example grief is expressed in the lungs, joy and lack of joy in the heart, fear in the kidneys, anger in the liver and rage the gallbladder (Danielle, 2019) Shame and guilt (Stewart et al., 2023). Can show up in different ways – the throat,

thyroid, chest and stomach. Man without emotion becomes a machine. Living without emotion is not the goal. The goal is to express emotion appropriately to keep energy flowing throughout the body.

All negative as well as positive emotion affects the functioning and balance of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system and the hypothalamic-pituitary- adrenal axis. Any long-term, deep-seated emotional imbalance will begin to weaken the affected area, and over time may cause health conditions related to that organ or to multiple organs depending on how long the condition has been manifesting.

In several of the traditional health and wellbeing approaches such as Ayurveda, Traditional Chinese medicine and Naturopathy it is understood that there is a powerful mind, body, and spirit connection. In order to establish health in any of these areas, we must obtain health in all three. Our emotions have a direct effect on our physical body (and vice versa) as well as our mental health and if deep-seated, unresolved emotions remain misaligned physical and or mental health will never be at its best.

In Chinese medicine the emotions are considered a key factor in health, with each emotion linked to a specific organ, a balanced flow of Qi (life energy), and physical wellbeing. *“In TCM theory, the human body is also explained from the emotional perspective. According to the theory of TCM, joy, anger, grief, thought, sorrow, fear, and fright are the seven emotions of a person, and the seven emotions also have an important influence on the physical condition of a person”* (Liu et al., 2021). Emotions are considered as energy and an imbalance in emotions is believed to lead to energy stagnation, causing physical symptoms such as tension, fatigue, and digestive issues. Treatments aim to balance Qi and restore harmony between mind and body.

The heart rules the spirit (Shen) and the emotional centre, if this is in balance it is easy to navigate the management of other emotions. As mentioned earlier, fear is connected to the kidneys. A bit of healthy fear is good – it keeps us safe and protected, however, excess fear can weaken personal root energy and lead to a depletion in the adrenal glands and immune system causing susceptibility to colds and viruses.

TCM and Ayurveda view this relationship slightly differently but fundamentally share the same principle. In Ayurveda *“The three main components of the body are Vata, Pitta, and Kapha. Vata, Pitta, and Kapha are considered the three primary psychobiological expressions of Nature, both individually and collectively, in Ayurveda. Maintaining the balance of these Doshas is crucial for all bodily functions. Whenever these Doshas are in balance, all bodily, mental, and sensory functions run smoothly.”*

(Mrunel et al. 2024). Both TCM and Ayurveda are in agreement that treating dis-balance in the body has to be inclusive of mind, body and spirit by addressing underlying emotions for the person be well and return to full vitality.

Every traditional approach has its own methods for addressing the release of emotions as well as assisting the client to change their behaviour patterns. For example, kinesiology, acupuncture, breathwork, emotional freedom technique, tapping, Phyto biophysics and herbal medicine, meditation, qi gong, tai chi, or yoga.

Where is this Leading?

To this day, conventional medicine only considers the physical manifestation of the imbalance their patient is presenting. When going to see a GP he or she will spend a short period of time understanding and looking at the symptoms without considering the patient - recent experiences, stress, diet, trauma and so on, often resulting in prescription medication and perhaps some dietary recommendations to “fix” the person. Empowerment of the patient to take responsibility for their healing and overall health remains with the doctor or specialist.

Whereas an Ayurvedic doctor or TCM practitioner diagnosis will include looking at pallor, pulse, tongue, nail health as well as diet and other lifestyle factors such as movement, job, family and relationships. Only when a thorough exploration is complete does the practitioner decide on approach of treatment, often prescribing herbs, acupuncture, lifestyle and dietary advice, dry skin brushing, breathing techniques and so on. In traditional healing systems and modalities, the patient leaves feeling empowered to take responsibility for their healing and overall health with the guidance of their chosen practitioner.

In business we talk about “doing the right job right, first time.” It is no different in health and healing. Treating symptoms is false economy. Treating the root cause is much more likely to result in a healthy happy patient who is empowered to take control of their health than a patient who keeps returning because things are getting no better, or even worse and they want fixing! In other words, they are getting emotionally exasperated and further weakened while at the same time lacking empowerment to change something.

The shift of responsibility from doctor to patient has to happen for several reasons – take the pressure off healthcare systems, reduce treatment costs, move to a model of care that is focused on prevention rather than cure, empower individuals to take responsibility for their health and decrease the reliance on pharmaceutical drugs in circumstances where education around diet, lifestyle, sleep, movement and hydration can treat the root cause achieving long term results and a healthier, happier person who is full of vitality.

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