

Translating Beliefs into Biology and Health

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Abstract

The relation and interaction between body and mind are no more matters of dispute. There is abundant medical research to show that brain could affect powerful changes in the body's chemistry depending on the kind of emotions one experiences. Our positive and negative to emotions are intimately related with a belief system we entertain. One's emotions, perceptions, values, and belief system all exert influence on mind and trigger hundreds of different chemicals in human brain. Hence the importance of expanding the knowledge about the way mind and body collaborate. Human beings need functional ideas, beliefs, and vision to cope with life and create health. Everybody needs a personalized belief system which is healthy and functional. Humans are wired to believe. Belief system shaken means life's energy ebbs. Healing is an innate capacity of the body. Medicine is only one element in aiding the body. Faith in oneself, one's doctor, faith in a transcendent being and prayer are some other variables that affect the healing. Since belief is not something easily measurable and tested, science tended to

Introduction

Hippocrates, the father of medicine, insisted that medical students give full weight to the emotions, both as a contributing cause of disease and as a factor in recovery. Aristotle discussed at length about the role of emotions in health and illness. Throughout history, physicians emphasized the importance of the patient's will to live in treating disease. Research

on themes central to psychosomatic medicine has blossomed over the past decades (Kurzweil, 2004). The science of emotions and health is not just a matter of arcane facts that could interest only a laboratory scientist. There are important implications for each of us: things we can do to improve our emotional state and influence our health for the better. When we think of psychology, we mostly think of the emotions and feelings. One simple truth cognitive psychology puts forth is that these emotions and feelings are situated on a certain belief system one has formed through one's early life experiences. Humans have the ability to make themselves ill or well based on the kind of belief system one has formed.

New Vistas

The possibility of using emotions as allies in promoting health and preventing illness is intriguing and exciting. There is abundant medical research to show that the brain, under circumstances of the negative emotions – hate, fear, panic, rage, despair, depression, exasperation, and frustration – could produce powerful changes in the body's chemistry, even set the stage for intensified illness. If this is true then positive emotions – purpose, love, hope, faith, determination, and optimism – could also affect biological states. These positive and negative emotions mentioned now are not separate entities that come and go in a random fashion. Our positive and negative emotions are intimately related with a belief system we entertain.

Norman Cousins in 1979 published the best selling *Anatomy of Illness as Perceived by the Patient* and opened new vistas in Health Psychology (34-35). In 1964 he was working as the editor of "The Saturday Review", was overcome by a crippling illness that landed him in the hospital in state of constant pain. Cousins, an avid reader of scientific and medical literature, suspected that he was suffering from adrenal exhaustion or a shutdown of his endocrine system. As he was wondering what to do with the situation, an idea struck his mind having had read Hans Selye's classical book, *The Stress of Life*. In that book, Selye detailed the negative effects of the negative emotions on body chemistry. The inevitable question arose in his mind: what about the positive emotions? If negative emotions produce negative chemical changes in the body, wouldn't positive emotions produce positive chemical changes? Is it possible that love hope, faith, optimism, confidence and the will to live have therapeutic value? Do chemical changes occur only on the downside? These and similar thoughts stimulated him to formulate a program of action to mobilise positive emotions. Since his constant pain had kept him awake without needed

sleep, he set his first objective as the reduction of pain. He began by viewing episodes of the old television shows that give him plenty of laughter. The results were immediate. It worked. He made a joyous discovery that ten minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anaesthetic effect and would give two hours of pain-free sleep. When the pain killing effect wore off, he would switch on some light entertainment again. Eventually, Cousins improved enough to return to work and published his best seller in which he reported that he had become pretty much pain free. Cousins (1979) put out in great clarity his new finding: "The will to live is not a theoretical abstraction, but a physiologic reality with therapeutic characteristics...what we are speaking about essentially, I suppose, is the chemistry of the will to live" (39). Since publication of Cousins' book, investigation of the neuro-chemistry of emotions has emerged as a major scientific venture. Research in the new hybrid field of neuropsychology, psychoneuro immunology, and neuroendocrine immunology has begun to map the physiological and biochemical connections that link our emotions and the operation of the several bodily systems (Levin, 2001). The consequence of an established link between emotions and health is serious. If emotions can heal and keep us well, they can also make us ill. In *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind*, former Harvard scientist, Dr. Joan Borysenko (1987) outlined the practical means to understand the 'emotional mind traps' that subvert our wellbeing. These traps, which Dr. Borysenko called 'the dirty tricks department of the mind', include negative personal and social beliefs, an insistence on being right, rationalising, disillusionment, and despair. Positive emotions stimulate mind-body communications that are keys to beneficial immunological responses.

Power of Beliefs

The idea that our beliefs about health, or aspects of our personality, might influence our health makes sense and is no longer controversial. Our health beliefs and the knowledge that we have about health influence our decision making as well as our commitment to make changes for the better. Clinical behavioural medicine emphasises techniques that enable people to change their behaviour and acquire skills for preventing disease and alleviating symptoms. By contrast, psychosomatic medicine emphasizes the role of beliefs, attitudes, and personality in health and illness. Psychosomatic researchers are more likely to study psychological states and character traits that increase or decrease risk than behaviours like smoking or alcohol consumption. Synthesized information from medical and psychiatric practice, psychology and biology are yet to come. As it is

now, there is no unified field theory of body-mind healing (Levin, 2001:112).

Whether we are able to recognize it or not, we all live by our belief system. Some people might say that they don't believe in anything that their scientific mind doesn't let them. They claim to have no kind of preconceived set of beliefs. This is fallacy. When you say you don't believe in anything, you believe in a belief system that does not believe. Our beliefs are so habitual that we are not aware of it. Every day you get into your car and drive down the street. While you get into the car and begin driving, you are underscoring a belief that other cars will stay on their side of the road. Without that faith, you would be driven mad by anxiety that other cars were going to breach their boundary and come crashing into you.

We all perhaps notice an interesting phenomenon that surpasses our normal understanding. Good people experience bad things in life and bad people sometimes experience a continuous stream of undeserved fortunate events. This is seen more in the medical field than anywhere. In the medical field, good things happen to bad people most times. I am speaking of people who violate every rule of health but who never get sick. They may smoke three packs of cigarettes a day, drink copious amounts of alcohol, follow an atrocious diet, and still live to be healthy and live longer than many who care about their health meticulously. We may shake our heads and say they are just lucky. Or that their luck will run out one day. There is also the talk of right genes that they are blessed with from birth, protected by a robust constitution that simply runs in the family. There are other possible explanations. They have a right and robust belief system. A belief system constantly reinforces, such as: "I will remain immune that these things will pass by." Those people, whose belief systems are riddled by fear, anxiety or apprehensions, are subject most to the vulnerable health conditions.

Our bodies are influenced and actually structured by our beliefs. We inherit many of these beliefs from our parents and circumstances of our upbringing. Beliefs can be rational and scientific. Most times it need not be rational and scientific. The power of your belief is not dependent on how much objective truth is in your thought or belief system. A 1998 study conducted at Brown University by Dr. John F. Reilly and his colleagues found that patients with chronic pain often find themselves experiencing chemical dependence, emotional distress, marital difficulties and family disruption. They express a disability pervading all aspects of life. It is not the pain itself that impairs their life and its mobility, but the

belief that pain has twisted and distorted their lives. The belief begins to work in their system as a self-fulfilling prophecy. We create reality by our values, beliefs and worldview. My world and its experiences are shaped by what I believe to be true. It is my interior world of ideas, values, and faith that decides the quality of my life. Since belief is not measurable and tested, science tends to overlook its positive and negative impact (Maniampra, 2007:77). You can choose to have beliefs and thoughts that are beneficial for health and wellbeing. Our basic beliefs are springboards of our continuous thoughts and images. Beliefs colour our interpretation of the world; they affect our behaviour. We create a world based on our beliefs. The intensity of faith matters when it comes to healing and health. Whether your faith is scientific or irrational, once you believe, it can trigger certain biochemical realities within your body.

Beliefs and Energy Field

It is not an exaggeration to say that one's belief system has the power to unlock or lock healing energies. Everything in this world is composed of energy. Things that we perceive to be solid and separate are in reality a different form of energy. One very basic law of energy is that matter can be converted to energy. Matter is a relatively dense and compact energy with slow movement and change. Even seemingly separated objects are in connection with each other by an intrinsic flow of energy from one thing to another. Our thoughts, beliefs, and fantasies all contain an energy level which is finer and more subtle. One law of energy is that energy of a certain quality or vibration tends to attract energy of a similar quality and vibration. This is why affirmative and positive thinking brings about changes. Our thoughts, feelings, and beliefs are capable of creating an energy field which attracts energy of a similar nature. By simply holding on to certain beliefs and ideas, we are creating an energy field which tends to attract more of the same. If you constantly think of illness, you are likely to attract more of the energy which may make you ill. When a person is negative, insecure, angry and anxious, he will be attracting the very same experiences which he wishes to avoid; this is because he is sending out signals continuously which affect him negatively.

Medical science's belief that the mind and consciousness is a by-product of matter and have no existence apart from matter is a handicapped worldview. Belief in the primacy of matter is a cultural belief cultivated over the centuries. The primacy of mind and consciousness over matter will challenge most of the medical notions prevailing today. Medicine is not yet ready to accept subtle energy movements and reorganisation of

disrupted energies in the human system. This bias to reject anything that is not material led to the rejection of Homeopathy and many other medical systems of China and India. Though, we cannot see the energy that makes up our body-mind and sustains us is, nevertheless, a vital part of us. Energy fields interact within the person. They also interact between one person and another and the world in general. Health and illness are affected by our emotional state and energy level within and without.

The impact of mind on the body and health has been established beyond doubt. The next question is what elements all influence the mind. One's emotions, perceptions, values, and belief system all exert an influence on the mind and trigger hundreds of different chemicals in the human brain. As the mind is intangible, so also are the elements that act on it. Franz Ingelfinger, editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, reminded the physicians that eighty-five percent of human illnesses are within the reach of the body's own healing system. Hence, the importance of expanding knowledge about the way our mind and body can collaborate in meeting serious challenges. Positive beliefs and attitudes are found to have lasting impact on what happens to the bodily level. The ability of the human mind to be steered in a certain direction has opened realistic possibilities for bringing about bio-chemical changes inside the human body.

Modern research provides the picture of the human brain not just as the seat of consciousness but as a gland producing at least several dozen basic secretions that have been identified so far. The brain is writing a prescription for the body when you are thinking or doing something (Cousins, 1989:178). The brain can produce substances that can combat infections or that have a vital role in maintaining the body's essential balance. For these and similar operations, the brain needs the right stimulation. Positive beliefs and attitudes are the right stimulation for the brain to produce needed secretions. Our ability to sustain severe pain can be enhanced as a result of substances produced in the brain. These chemicals have morphine-like molecules.

Firewalking is an instance that your body-brain can produce morphine-like things to reduce pain. Dr. John C. Liebeskind, a psychologist, was able to show that the body under heightened emotional circumstances could produce its own pain killing secretion. The emotional preparation session that generally precedes this kind of highly charged emotional event is a prerequisite. Often there is an emotional workup session by the cheering people and the enthusiastic crowd. The preparation session produces an element of mass hypnosis and self-hypnosis which reduce

the blistering effect. We are faced with another hypothesis. A belief system could affect bodily events within a range. It is well known that people, even if they are not under trancelike conditions, can be told, while blindfolded, that a hot knife will be applied to the skin for only a second. A cold knife touches the skin very lightly and produces a burn blister. The heat obviously is furnished by the mind (Cousins, 1989:184). This is a simple example that beliefs can create reality and biology. If you don't have the right beliefs and expectations, even the right medical care won't take you far enough. Along with external medicines and care, one has to jack up internal medicines that one's mind can produce. Many patients have overcome terrible odds and downsized predictions simply by raising their inner resources. These inner resources include – faith in oneself, faith in physician, faith in medicine and, above all, faith in a benevolent God who can heal.

Formation of Belief System

At the core of everyone's self concept lays the belief system from which tapes or scripts are formed and constantly being played out. Our values, beliefs, and expectancies are part of our self-concept. The scripts are at play without our awareness and influence all our actions reactions, thoughts and attitudes. Scripts have the power to set you up for a specific outcome (McGraw, 2001:78). When that happens, we can say that beliefs have become self-limiting fixed beliefs. They are highly resistant to change. The problem with fixed belief is that it closes the data window. New data is always filtered against the fixed beliefs or its organisational form script and has to go to a confirm mode. In cognitive psychology, it is termed as filters. As we develop scripts through the filters, an organisational principle is formed about how things are supposed to work. Because of this conforming mode or filters, you don't listen to contrary, positive information. It is simply impossible now for you to believe.

Belief systems are formed out of certain defining moments in life which are related to parents, teachers, people, relations, society, world, religion, etc. Once it is formed, we carry it around to every part of our lives. They influence every value you have, your perception of basic worth as a human being, your core traits and characteristics. They tell you where your boundaries are. They contain your expectation about what ought to happen in your life. Whether the issue is about relationships, fulfilment in the working world, or interaction with one's children or spouse, your fixed beliefs exert a powerful influence. Fixed beliefs express themselves through concepts like *should* and *must*. They are in truth demands you make to

your own life. If your beliefs were not fixed, you might well be asking questions and forming new expectations. Fixed beliefs keep a person on track with stereotyped tasks and roles. It establishes boundaries of what you are willing to accept from life. Once you know what your fixed beliefs are, you can easily identify the script you are running. If a script has been running for so long a period of time, the harder you will find it to chip away. Fixed beliefs say to you in advance how things are going to turn out. They shape your expectations about the outcomes.

Fixed beliefs influence the casting of our lives. They determine our choice of who will and will not get part of our life. They influence setting: the places and situations in which our life will unfold. And they even will have a say about costumes and masks: the physical appearance, clothing, and style you choose to present to the world. Here is a key thing to understand about fixed beliefs: you are naturally not inclined to make any changes to it; a sense of destiny rules you. There is a safety to be in the familiar domain. Uncertainty and the unknown are frightening. Therefore, so many people are content with their present misery. The words of Ralph Waldo Emerson are worth remembering, "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." What lies within us is capable of changing our life radically for good or bad.

Negative beliefs and irrational thoughts are noxious; still many hang on to them for fear of jumbling into the unknown. Dying to the old and outdated and being born again requires courage. Without denying the old self that limits and constricts, and without taking the pain of being born, one will get struck where he is at present. In most therapies, the therapist gives acceptance and approval to the client so that they approve and accept themselves and feel strong enough to change their outmoded beliefs. Human beings need functional ideas, beliefs and vision to cope with life (McGraw, 2001:82). If the beliefs we hold are outmoded, they have to be dropped and we must formulate a new set of functional beliefs. Ideas and beliefs that do not stimulate and mould new vision should be discontinued.

The judgements, interpretations, meanings, and reactions one gives to life, events, people, God, and the world need a second look; they are most often not personally discovered by you but borrowed from many sources – mostly from other people around you (Maniampra, 1988:88). You cannot thrive with the visions and beliefs of other people. Everyone needs a personalized belief system which is healthy and functional. Our

thoughts and beliefs have an impact on our mind, body and emotions. Just think about someone slicing a lemon, your salivary glands begin to respond at the very thought. The learning experiences of early years have a tremendous impact on our thinking and behaviour. Most of the messages we receive from parents, teachers, and authority figures solidify as a belief system and begin to influence life slowly. As some of the messages are limiting and negative, naturally the belief system also will reflect those traits. We have ideas and beliefs about ourselves which we form in our early years of life and we resist disposing of them, no matter how restricting they may be. Because there is security in the known, even though, it is self-limiting. We accept a lot of restrictive messages from our families, schools, and surroundings like: be punctual, don't show your anger, be neat and tidy, and don't look for too much fun.

These and similar messages have been stored to form our belief system and attitudes and reactions to life. Most of these messages are good: how much rigidity or flexibility allied with these messages is the critical part of it. We draw life limiting negative messages from all quarters. If the negative messages outnumber the positive ones, its repercussion will occur in the belief system, too. Negative messages are in a nutshell the same. They convey that you are no good, you are a failure, and your situation is hopeless. As we grow, this belief is reinforced almost daily: it becomes a fertile ground for negative, irrational thinking, and beliefs. John Roger, a psychologist, made this apt observation: "You can think of unworthiness as a vulture that sits own your shoulder, squawks in your ear a seemingly endless stream of, you can't do it; you are not good enough; don't try; you will never make it." Disputing, debating, and correcting these irrational beliefs and ideas and replacing them with rational and functional beliefs are the essence of cognitive behaviour therapy.

Negative belief systems draw us back to the past. Instead of shrinking into our negative beliefs and thoughts, we should stretch ourselves into the future with positive thoughts and affirmations. The more we allow negative thinking, the more negative beliefs we form. For some, negative thinking becomes a habit and addiction. Like any other addiction, negative thinking must be treated with commitment, patience, and discipline.

Beliefs Become Biology

We noticed how the belief systems are being formed. The scripts we cast from the beliefs determine our quality of life. Our psychic experience and social life are deeply embedded in our belief systems. Now we move on to another dimension of beliefs. A number of studies show that the

human mind can convert ideas and expectations into bio-chemical realities. Perhaps the most dramatic example of these studies concerned the phenomenon of the placebo.

By definition, a placebo is an inert substance – mostly a sugar pill, designed to look like a real drug and given to satisfy the desire of the patient for medicine when no indication exists for a genuine prescription. Generally, people who go to the doctor expect some medicine for their cure. Consequently, no medication means no cure. Patients believe that medicines at the very least are good to speed up the cure. Everyone goes to the hospital or clinic with these beliefs. Doctors who do not want to disappoint their patients give placebos when no other medicine is warranted. The term placebo connotes something repugnant, less serious, and unethical. But it need not be so. If the patient reports relief from the placebo, it is interpreted that the pain was subjective and has no objective physiological basis. A true understanding on the nature of placebos and its working on the human mind will dispel the present misgivings and will lead to the use of it in a beneficial way for building health (Weil, 1998).

Medical researchers have been increasingly fascinated by the fact that many people when told what to expect in the way of a medication's effects will actually experience those effects even though the medication is replaced by a pill containing a totally innocuous substance, perhaps sugar or saline. The anticipation and belief of a physical effect bring about actual physical change. A number of placebo studies have shown significant bodily changes as the result of beliefs and anticipation. In accordance with the informed consent procedure in the Department of Surgery at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, England, 411 patients were told they could expect hair loss from the chemotherapy drug about to be administered. Thirty percent of the patients unknowingly received placebos instead of the chemotherapy drug and suffered hair loss even though the pills they had taken contained no medication (Fielding & others, 1983). What is most significant about the placebo response is the proof it offers that beliefs or expectations can be converted to physiological reality.

The natural conclusion emerging from placebo research is that belief affects biology. This knowledge is integral to the treatment of illness. It doesn't mean medical treatment can be supplanted by psychological or emotional approaches, but that effective reach of the physician can be expanded by awareness of emotional factors involved in the cause of disease and in a comprehensive strategy of treatment (Cousins,

1979:231). Placebos work and effect cure in some cases because of the patient's belief that he or she is ingesting a powerful substance. Belief systems and emotions affect the immune system. The question of the role played by various systems in bodily repair and healing has been addressed by a number of research studies. One of the conclusions is that positive emotions, expectations, and beliefs are associated with faster healing and repairing of the disturbed system. Belief systems and emotions alter the production of hormones, neurotransmitters and opioids that interfere with various steps in the healing process.

Anaesthesiologist Dr. Henry K. Beecher (1955) of Harvard Medical School observed that the greater the pain or anxiety, the more effective the placebo. He noted that the effectiveness of any drug is a combination of its chemical ingredients and the confidence of the patient that it will work. This accounts for the effectiveness of placebos in ameliorating a variety of disorders ranging from angina pectoris and gastrointestinal disorders to fever and the common cold. Dr. Jon D. Levine of the Department of Neurology at the University of California studied post-operative dental patients. He found that the pain relief from expectations linked to placebos actually triggered the body's own anaesthesia or endorphins. Such research suggests that the psyche, sometimes regarded as a separate entity from the rest of the body, is a wrong concept that the contents of the mind: beliefs, values, and expectations are intimately related to the body, that they become a physical reality and our biology.

Even the most positive attitudes and beliefs are no guarantee of cure in a given case, but they can help create an environment conducive to medical care and can enable the patient to get the most out of whatever may be possible. A strong will to live, along with other positive beliefs – faith, love, hope, purpose, humour – are bio-chemical realities that can affect the environment of medical care. Both doctors and patients are justified in hoping for the best and working for the best. If the physician tends to treat a serious disease, he must convince the patient to believe that the effort is worthwhile. Family, friends and support groups are helpful in creating needed beliefs and attitudes to facilitate healing. Just as the brain tends to convert bad news into panic and helplessness so, too, strong support from the family and friends can help maintain or restore emotional equilibrium and fast healing. To sum up, medical technology is not the ultimate arbitrator: it is you; your mind, body, spirit and your beliefs around these entities are what really matter. The point is modern medicine is great, but there are other resources also available in the human person.

Emotions and health are related. It has been known for many years now that negative emotions and experiences can have negative impact on health and can complicate medical treatment. The reciprocal body/mind relationship is complex. We must be aware equally of both the potential power and the limitations of attitudes and beliefs in their effects on health and disease. Positive attitudes and faith are no substitute for competent medical attention. Barrie Cassileth, in *The New England Journal of Medicine* wrote: "Our study of patients with advanced, high risk malignant diseases suggest that the inherent biology of disease alone determines the prognosis, overriding the potentially mitigating influence of psychosocial factors." This means that in advanced diseases biology overwhelms psychology. It does not mean that emotions, attitudes, and beliefs play no role in the treatment or wellbeing of people. The effects of certain therapies are so strong that they drown all other factors, including beliefs. If an individual is injected with a thousand units of quick insulin, no matter who believes what, the chances are that he will become unconscious as the blood sugar plummets.

Research on the self has been brought to bear on understanding health habits and has yielded a particularly significant insight: positive beliefs may actually help people come to grips with health threats and adopt better health behaviours. In the past researchers had expressed fear that optimistic beliefs may interfere one's ability to process negative health related information appropriately (Taylor & Sherman, 2004:306). However, subsequent researches proved that optimistic people are more receptive to negative information about the risk of health behaviours.

Healing and the Physician's Belief System

Everybody may now acknowledge the power of one's belief system and its effect on one's sense of wellbeing. It may sound a little outrageous to think that somebody else's faith and belief system can affect you adversely or beneficially. To put it simply, a physician's beliefs shape the outcome of therapy. If this is so, then it is vital to examine or explore the beliefs of your physician. Any healing transaction involves two sets of beliefs: the patient's and the physician's. Physicians can exert powerful influence through their beliefs. For instance, if they strongly favour a therapy, they can talk up to its effect to the patient. The enthusiastic cheerleading can inflate the patient's expectations and set the stage for dramatic placebo effects, even though the therapy itself may be inherently ineffective. This can be a problem in scientific medical research. In single blind studies where the patients do not know whether they are taking an active

medication or a placebo pill, the doctor can unconsciously show more interest and enthusiasm in the experimental group than the control group. This can lead to a heightened response on the part of the experimental group, all due to the belief that they should do better.

Researcher, Jerry Solfvin (1984) examined extensively the power of the physicians underlying beliefs. In three double blind studies of the use of Vitamin E in treating angina pectoris, the pain associated with coronary artery disease, an enthusiastic doctor who believed in Vitamin E found it significantly more effective than the placebo, while two studies conducted by sceptics showed no effect (55-56). Studies suggested strongly that beliefs of the prescribing physician could somehow penetrate the double blind conditions of the experiment and shape the action of the drug. It is amply clear by now that we cannot easily dismiss the belief system of the physician. If physicians' beliefs shape reality, this means that patients should carefully examine the beliefs of a doctor before affiliating with him/her. This is not commonly done, though it is significant. Patients may be attending to the doctors' credentials and years of experience, but rarely go to inquire about the physician's belief structure and its effect that might have on the outcome.

Larry Dossey, (1993) the author of *Healing Words*, compares belief to prayer. Both prayer and beliefs are non-local manifestations of consciousness because both can operate at a distance, sometimes outside of the patient's awareness. Both affirm that it is not at all physical and both can be used adjunctively with other forms of therapy (135-137). The idea of subtle or non-local energy is close to universal. Most of the world's religious and healing systems now acknowledge such a concept. Only western medicine seems to reject the idea of a spiritual energy or force that heals disease or helps to maintain health and wellness (Levin, 2001:172).

Hundreds of different therapies are being practiced throughout the world to effect cure. Some of them are inconsistent with the principles of healing. In spite of these glaring defects, certain therapeutics could affect cure. It is obvious that it is not the therapeutic principles involved in the medicine system that heals, but something else. Those who choose certain types of therapeutics chose them because they have faith in that system. The belief in a therapeutic system is critical in effecting healing. Practitioners, who can create belief in their system, though objectively it may sound unscientific, can affect cure. As long as the therapy is professed to be the latest and the greatest, a vast majority of patients will experience beneficial results. As soon as the patient's faith in the therapy is gone, the results

also fade. What we believe about our doctor and medical treatment will markedly affect our illness and recovery. Our attitudes and belief system also affect people close to us.

A doctor's beliefs, personality, and behaviour patterns affect the way in which patients are treated and healed. Some practitioners are effective therapists because of the way they relate with patients. The relationship itself becomes therapeutic. Confidence and faith can be instilled by caregivers and doctors by forging a trusting relationship if it is lacking in the patient. A practitioner's faith in his therapeutics excites the patient's belief. The patient then easily takes on the doctor's confidence. So the patient's faith, the practitioner's faith and the relationship that exists between the therapist and the patient are the three principles involved in any healing besides the efficacy of any medical intervention.

Since belief is not that easily measurable and tested, science tends to overlook its positive and negative impact. One can choose to have beliefs and cultivate right beliefs and thoughts that are beneficial for health and wellbeing. One's basic beliefs are a springboard of one's continuous thoughts and images. Beliefs colour our interpretation of the world; they affect our behaviour. We create a world based on our beliefs. There is persuasive evidence that one's religious faith and beliefs help to lessen the harmful effects of chronic illness (Krause, 1989). Strong religious faith matters when it comes to physical and mental health.

A Holistic Approach

Our health is not created by external factors as medicine previously believed, but by many elements visible and invisible. Sometimes strong affirmative beliefs are all one needs to feel a sense of wellbeing. At other times, creating a conducive physical environment by means of medicine or surgery is essential along with other beliefs. Since it is difficult to measure how much one's belief system helps, and what percentage medicine helps, it is desirable to promote a belief system. Promoting positive beliefs and confidence in oneself (that is the power of one's body to heal) is an essential element to bring about optimum wellbeing. Besides faith in oneself, the body's power to heal, the faith in the doctor as well as in the drug or treatment method can effect healing. One element taken by itself may fail. Humans have always entertained beliefs and hope in oneself, nature, God, and in other people who can take care of them. At times these beliefs are shaken by certain accidents or disasters, but sooner or later individuals regain it. The sooner one regains it, the better the health prospects. Lack of faith in oneself, in others, and in a

transcendent being means losing the vitality of life. A belief system shaken means life's energy ebbs. In the final analysis, depression is a loss of faith in oneself, nature, and the transcendent. Life's energy bounces back when faith is regained.

Donald Hebb's (1949) view that consciousness is inseparable from the functioning of the individual brains remains the cornerstone of physiological psychology, although more than 60 years have passed since his publication of the book, *Organization of Behaviour*. In the materialistic philosophy of Medicine, there is no room for the physician's beliefs or the patient's beliefs to affect the outcome of therapy. The materialistic view is deeply ingrained in the emotional levels of most physicians. Materialism is part of the credo of modern medicine where there is no room for consciousness or any spiritual entities. As the result of this tunnel vision, they easily dismiss and deny the validity of anything that challenges them. This is not surprising. Scientists and physicians, like rest of us, have an emotional need to believe they are right, free of bias, and to open to evidence of any kind (Dossy, 1993:169).

Our human system is wired to believe. This potential is given to us to further our health and wellbeing. The powers of our mind can be used to create better health. To tap our mind powers, we have to go beyond the duality of the mind and body as separate units (Maniampra, 1996:86). Our mind is present all through our body, through our brain and nervous system. The extraordinarily complex brain and nervous system assess every input in our body such as images, thoughts, beliefs, directives, and literally reconstitutes itself and acts upon the new reconstruction. Andrew Weil, MD (1998) puts it in the right perspective: "Healing is an innate latent capacity of the mind/body, waiting to be released or unblocked by methods that directly give sick people a hand in overcoming illness but succeed only if the beliefs of both patients and practitioner interact productively with them" (103).

The mind and body are intimately linked via the immune, endocrine, and central nervous systems. Body and mind form a single unit. There is no disease that isn't mental, emotional, as well as physical. The inseparable body and mind are again an expression of some profound reality which we call spirit. We can view our bodies as a manifestation of spiritual energy. Our emotions and thoughts are part of this spiritual energy. The spirit-mind-body continuum can be adequately understood only when we appreciate ourselves as an ever-changing energy system that is affected by, and also affects, the energy surrounding it (Northrup, 1998:27). We

don't end up at our bodies. When we begin to view ourselves as fields of energy with the ability to affect the quality of our own experience, we will be getting in touch with our innate ability to heal ourselves and create health every day in our lives.

Conclusion

Since mind-body reactions are real and capable of creating new physical realities by means of positive beliefs, medicine should take advantage of this connection to heal people. Any system of treatment can cure people irrespective of what direct effect the therapeutic principle makes provided it can bring the mind into action as an indirect result of the therapeutics. Even procedures based on ridiculous theories can help or cure people if they work as "active placebos." The mind plays a subtle role that is not measurable by scientific methods. If the belief of a patient and doctor coincide, it is most ideal and brings out the best. If the patient's worldview and beliefs are of a positive note, even if it may be in conflict with the therapists view, it should be given a chance. In holistic therapies consciousness is considered as the key to health and healing. This sometimes gives an occasional advantage over regular medicine, which disregards consciousness. Attitudes, values, and perspectives shape the way energy is organized and mobilized in our bodies. The way of looking at health and disease from a different perspective can empower one to choose health.

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