

The CSI of Health Care: Holistic Medicine

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There are many reasons that America loves CSI. They are good stories and contain lots of great technical feats and facts. In addition, the characters in the original show also have intriguing personal lives and relationships.

However, there is another aspect of the show that we find appealing: the amount of resource that goes into solving a murder. In fact, "real life" juries now expect the level of detail that these shows glamorize. We like to think that if we were to meet an unnatural doom, the CSI's would swarm in to serve justice--that our lives are worth the cost.

It's this romance with problem-solving that is the basis of the hit show House. Hospital patients and staff are willing to put up with the main character's misanthropy because he doesn't miss a detail (often searching the patients's home for clues), and is the only one who can solve the case.

How Holistic CSI's Work

In Holistic Medicine, everything counts. Every detail, whether subjective or objective, normal or abnormal, might make or break a case. Not only genes, but childhood health may give a clue as to why someone is now stuck at age 5, 25, 55 or 85. Stomach problems ten years ago may explain why you have fatigue today. An injury to your knee twenty years ago may be a root cause for your shoulder arthritis today. Just as no two murders are the same (or else these shows would get quite redundant!), no two cases of diabetes or high cholesterol have the same causes. No two people get the same evaluations or treatment.

Our society has been so influenced by science and the scientific method, that we tend to think very linearly. The basic concept of dis-ease, reinforced by the discovery of bacteria and antibiotics, is "one disease, one cause, one treatment". For example "pneumonia is caused by bacteria and is treated with antibiotics". "Heartburn is caused by stomach acid and is treated with anti-acids". "Depression is caused by neurotransmitter imbalance and is treated by antidepressants".

This paradigm works well when illness is acute. Yes, I want antibiotics for my pneumonia. However, after sinusitis recurs three times per year for several years, maybe antibiotics aren't the solution. Yes, I want surgery if I'm in a car accident and I'm bleeding from several places. But arthroscopy for knee pain is no better than time and exercise according to the research.

Holistic medicine utilizes a whole new (and very old) way of thinking and approaching illness called a "paradigm shift" by recognizing that most chronic illnesses are multi-dimensional. By the time an illness is chronic (i.e. more than six months), it is virtually impossible to find a single remedy that will solve the problem(s). Health is like a web, where everything is

connected to everything else. Not only is every organ connected to each other, we, as organ-isms, are also connected to each other. Just think of how the illness of one family member can cause stress and consequent illness in other family members. The data on the effect of these interpersonal stressors on health are uncontroversial; and yet rarely asked about or dealt with in a typical medical office visit.

Chinese and Ayurvedic (Indian) medicine have used a multi-dimension approach for thousands of years. However, this new paradigm goes against the socialization and TV commercials that have shaped our concepts our entire lives. Research also shows us that the vast majority of primary care office visits are for "non-organic" i.e. emotional or mind-body problems that can't be measured with routine blood tests or MRI's. We ask for these tests, but then we're dissatisfied because they don't validate or explain our subjective state of not feeling well.

The Intuitive and Subjective Dimension

The "art" of medicine involves intuition, the sensing of a truth that is hidden behind the facts. Isn't that how these detective shows work? The investigators just happen to look in the right place, or know a fact that no one else does (such as how entomological (bug) knowledge has come in useful in several CSI shows).

In our search for "truth", the subjective realm--our beliefs, emotions and hunches are important. Often, the symptom of "pain" that we try to "kill" (using pain killers) is the subtle wisdom of our inner body/mind trying to communicate to us. The body doesn't use language, so we must "listen" with more than our ears.

As a Holistic Practitioner, the saying "Physician Heal Thyself" becomes a mandate. If I am not taking good care of myself--eating the same diet that I recommend, taking the same supplements, practicing yoga, getting occasional acupuncture and/or body work, sleeping well, placing priority on my spiritual life, then not only can't I be a model, I can't my best in listening and sensing the blocks to my patients' healing.

Turning to Holistic Medicine

Even after failing to get satisfaction with numerous doctors and therapies, people often turn to Holistic Medicine for help. Is it that they have unrealistic hope? Or is it that they are following an inner message that tells them that they can get better? They've had hints of healing, such as an unexpected string of good days. They have a sense that if they can achieve improvement for a even a few moments, maybe there is something out there that can extend that relief to a few more moments, or even weeks or months. Conversely, if something consistently makes a symptom worse, this can be an important clue. When the dentist probes and finds an

abscess, we are glad, not angry at the dentist for "causing" pain. We know that finding the abscess is necessary for true healing, rather than using blanket, symptom-masking approaches.

People also have an intuitive sense that if their practitioner truly listens to them, then this will enhance their healing. While the magic of *listening* is a topic for a separate article (see my related articles, listed below) suffice it to say that having a practitioner who will listen to you, and encourage you to listen to yourself (hard for most of us) can be the beginning of the healing path. Yoga philosophy tells us that all the truth we need is within. A modern spin on this concept is that your symptoms are messages from your inner wisdom telling you to make a change. For most of us, making changes in the ways we eat, sleep, move, work and love will profoundly affect our health. This is not just conjecture--science tells us this.

And so, a detailed history from a holistic practitioner, who might ask you about your comfort foods, relationships or spiritual beliefs may gain the clues needed to solve the crime! In addition, this practitioner might encourage you to spend time with your self, and inspire you to make necessary changes that will facilitate your healing. These methods are time-proven (yoga and acupuncture are thousands of years old), simple and low-cost (compared to drugs and surgery).

Rules Of The Game

In working with a Holistic Practitioner, the principles and process are different. Here are some basics:

1. Be prepared to take responsibility for changes in your lifestyle. Figure out what you're willing to do and not to do. Make a commitment to these changes. The alternatives are pills and procedures (i.e. conventional medicine).
2. Keep learning. Knowledge is power.
3. Understand that there are risks for you, and your practitioner, in pursuing alternatives. While overall, holistic medicine is vastly safer than conventional medicine (in fact, conventional medicine is in the top five causes of death in our country), holistic medicine it is under scrutiny due to the fact that it is challenging the powers-that-be. Unlike medications for chronic illness, some herbs, supplements and other remedies are both diagnostic and therapeutic--your practitioner needs to monitor your response to determine what to do next. So to decrease the risks and increase the chances of success, be sure to do the things that you have agreed; and follow-up regularly so your program can be adjusted as needed.
4. Understand that all people, including yourself, are paid based on time. Don't expect time from a practitioner, or his/her staff for free. Also, if your practitioner accepts insurance for your visit (a rare situation), respect his/her need to work within the insurance guidelines.
5. Holistic medicine is as much as philosophical, ethical, social and economic movement as it is for health; so share your experience and learning with your family,

friends and coworkers. It may be one of the only ways to heal the health care system itself.

6. Understand that the journey to health is a winding path. Don't expect quick responses. However, the Holistic Path can get you long-lasting, life-enhancing results if you get on the path. Even one percent per week amounts to 52% at the end of a year, not including the compounding effect! In addition, since we are all connected, your health, or ill-ness will affect the health of your family and your society; so if you don't do it for yourself, do it for them!

IMPORTANT NOTE: This general information should not be used to make decisions about medical care without the involvement of an experienced practitioner.

For More Information

- O See Dr. Cheikin's related articles on: Listening to Your Pain, Journaling and others
- O Dr. Cheikin's website, www.cheikin.com, has helpful articles on related topics
- O Dr. Cheikin offers workshops on topics such as Chronic Pain, Journaling, Nutrition, Weight Management, and classes in yoga, meditation and other wellness methods. Please call to be placed on his contact list or if you wish to host a Workshop.
- O Campbell, TC & Campbell TM: The China Study: The Most Comprehensive Study of Nutrition Ever Conducted and the Startling Implications for Diet, Weight Loss and Long-Term Health. Benbella Books, 2005. ISBN: 1932-100-385.
- O Pizzorno, Joseph: Total Wellness: Improve Your Health by Understanding... Prima, 1997, ISBN 0761-510-94X.
- O Sivananda Center: The Sivananda Companion to Yoga. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983. ISBN: 0684-87000-2.
- O Hanley, JL et al: Tired of Being Tired. New York: Putnam, 2001. ISBN 0399-147-497.
- O Bland, Jeffrey: The 20-Day Rejuvenation Diet Program. Los Angeles: Keats, 1999. ISBN 0879-839-805.
- O Lieberman, Shari: Real Vitamin & Mineral Book: Definitive Guide..., 3rd Ed. NY: Avery, 2003. ISBN 1583-331-522.

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