

HOLISTIC MEDICINE

“To see the World in a grain of sand”

—Blake

The word ‘Holistic’ is derived from the word ‘whole’ and means complete. Holistic medicine is the term applied to a collection of different trends, current in health care. Like the expression ‘Stress’, ‘Holistic Medicine’ is becoming over used and abused, conveying different meanings to different people. The term ‘holism’ was first introduced by Jan Christian Smuts, a South African Philosopher in 1926, describing the study of whole organisms and systems. Holistic medicine is not just about alternate or complementary medicine nor an approach as an attack on current medical practice. It is about whole person medicine, a concept, we are all familiar with and a good clinical care naturally necessitates the approach to the patient as a whole. Some of the more recent scientific discoveries such as Psycho-Physio-Neuro-Immunological mechanisms of stress, the holographic theory of brain storage mechanisms, field force in human functioning lend ample support to the holistic approach to health and medicine. The facts and principles on which holistic medicine is based, is that the human organism is a multidimensional being, possessing body, mind and spirit and each affecting the other, interconnectedness between the human beings and their environment and the principle, that illhealth arises as a result of a state of imbalance within the human being or of external force and each human being possesses a powerful and innate capacity for healing himself/herself and the primary task is to encourage the self innate capacity for health, either through education or direct intervention. Its emphasis is more on an approach to health care than on any specific system of treatment.

The concept of holistic health care implies a shift from the disease/medical model, to a health/whole personal model. Holistic medicine is more than a medical method, rather a philosophy of life.

Health has been traditionally defined as absence of disease, disease as deviation from a biochemical norm. This concept of physical health was based on the germ theory of disease—a Biomedical concept but this alone was inadequate in defining several major health problems such as mental illness, accidents, drug addiction etc.

The WHO, defined health as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely absence of disease or infirmity. One of the criticisms against the WHO definition is that it considers health as a 'state' whereas 'health' is a dynamic process, necessitating every day demands—biochemical, environmental, psychological etc.

Health has been viewed as a state of balance between man and his environment by ecologists (ecological concept) and naturally a concept of continuous mutual adaptation. However, man is constantly changing his environment faster than he could adapt by urbanisation, industrialisation, deforestation and production of chemicals and pesticides, resulting in newer health problems caused by air, water and food pollution and above all social disorganisation. There is also considerable variation in the normals and ecology from country to country and health remains as a relative concept and is defined in terms of prevailing ecological conditions.

The constant fluctuation of health has led to postulation of the spectrum of health, such as positive health, better health, more sickness, mild sickness, severe sickness and death, etc. In this concept health is compared to the term happiness, where there is hierarchy, less happy or more happy and most happy. On the contrary, health should be considered as an idealistic goal like contentment and peace.

In the biosocial concept, the disease is both a biological and social phenomenon. Thus the social, cultural and psychological factors must be taken into consideration in defining health. Stressful environment endangers health. Mental and social health are closely related and one affects the

other. The 29th World Health Assembly took note of the importance of Social Health; and Research and Training Centre for psychological factors of WHO was set up and several manifestations of psychological health such as adequate feeling of security, self evaluation, worth-whileness, adequate spontaniety and emotional contact with reality, bodily desires and the ability to gratify them, adequate self knowledge, life goals and ability to learn from experience etc. Therefore there are three components of health-physical, mental and social, in recent years a fourth component has been suggested viz, spiritual health. Earlier saying was 'I do not believe in spirits because I am a scientist', Today, many say 'I believe in spirits because I am a scientist'. These systems influence one another and implies that the balance between health and illness can be maintained or disturbed at any level.

Holistic concept of health is a synthesis of all the aforesaid concepts and corresponds to the view held by our ancestors and Rishis that Health implies a sound mind in a sound body in a sound environment. Holistic health is positive-emphasising whole person rather than to the parts. To find health through holistic practices means seeking the most appropriate and effective level to work at, set goals, obtain information and work on these lines and evaluate progress.

It is important to add years to life but it is more important to add quality to years. Charaka, the great Indian physician, who lived 3,000 years ago has said "Health is vital for ethical, artistic, material and spiritual development of man."

Buddha said '*AROGYAM PARAMAM LAABHAM*' meaning "of all the gains, the gains of health are the highest and richest in the world." Health may be new, but philosophy of health and care of patient as a whole by keeping the proper balance of mind, body, spirit and the environment has been the basis of India's traditional health care system of thousands of years.

Thus in order to attain and maintain total health, the answer lies in the

