

Mind - Body Connection

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After graduation, I started my career working as clinical nurse in Coronary Care Unit. One day I saw a 38-year old business executive named Mr RK Sharma. He was extremely agitated in waiting room because he had to wait for 15 minutes. He began to shout at the receptionist, declaring he was extremely busy man who had no time to waste and doctor should not have made an appointment for him if he could not see him immediately at given time.

When I saw him in the examining room shortly thereafter he was extremely angry, he started off by telling me that doctor thought only their time was valuable and that they had no regard for the patient's time. After doctor's examination he was informed that he was probably having attack of unstable angina pectoris. According to the doctor he should be admitted to hospital for further diagnostic tests. When Mr RK Sharma heard this, he lost complete control of himself.

He panted and raved about the impossibility of taking doctor's advice. I could see literally that he was beginning to froth around the mouth and was losing colour of his face. In the movement he clutched at his chest and fell to the floor. It was obvious he had suffered a cardiac arrest. Resuscitation measures were attempted but to no avail.

Twenty minutes after this patient walked into cardiac clinic, he was dead. Autopsy revealed a heart attack, and also that his coronary arteries were clean; no obstruction of the sort was seen although the artery may be clogged. The heart attack had been caused instead by spasm of the coronary vessel directly induced by hostility, resentment, impatience, fear and exaggerated feeling of being indispensable. Mr RK Sharma was killed in a matter of two minutes by his thoughts. This entire incident left many questions unanswered.

One question still disturbs me, was there any of my role as nurse to save Mr Sharma from the clutches of death.

As I grew in my profession certain facts dawned upon me, which I would like to share with you. The partnership of mind and body is like a balloon; if you squeeze it in one place, it always bulges out somewhere else. In a bad habit, the body gives way as much as it can to accommodate the mind's desire e.g. allowing blood pressure (BP) to rise, stress hormones to unduly heighten flight response and heart beat to increase. But with time the stressed part of the body grows to fit the bulge. Then there is no flexibility left. The outcome is chronic high blood pressure, an exhausted hormonal system and a strained heart as was in the case of Mr Sharma.

The status of health at a given time is sum total of all impulses (positive or negative); you are what you think, if you are happy, that just means you cherish happy thoughts most of the time. If you are depressed that means that you have sad thoughts most of the time. Into this type of calculation enter all our other states of mind as well as our daily share of anger, fear, envy, greed, kindness, comparison, love. These are simply thoughts. When one of them happens to predominate, it leads to corresponding state of mind and thus corresponding state of physiology.

What one pays attention to, it has a tendency to grow. If one's attention is attracted to negative situation and emotions then they will grow in awareness e.g. if one is having hostile thought it will be reflected in his mood, facial expression, social behaviour. Physically also he will scowl, get impatient, difficult to deal with; he is likely to churn up too much acid in his stomach and lot of adrenaline in blood stream and consequently may develop peptic ulcer and hypertension.

Awareness is composite of all the things one pays attention to. When one finds something meaningful to focus on, say a significant goal

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it takes a step closer to creating health. A goal gives people something to live for - a project, a profession, a family and body responds to these with vitality. This sort of awareness replenishes energy.

Thoughts arise from interaction with the world and affect the body for better or worse with lingering impression in forms of moods, tendencies towards disease, actual disease symptoms and process of wearing out of body overtime.

Thoughts determine the outcome of disease process. Defeating pain is good example. A placebo is a pill made of sugar and some inert colouring to make it look like an authentic drug. Patients are given it with the information that it is in fact an authentic and powerful medicine. Patient experiences same pain relief as if a real pain killer had been administered. The same dummy pill can be used to kill pain, to stop excessive gastric secretion in ulcer patient, to lower BP, or fight tumours.

In one recent study members of a group of patients suffering from bleeding ulcer were given what their doctor described as most potent current drug for treating ulcer. The ulcer of more than 75 percent immediately stopped bleeding. Another group however was told that the drug was experimented and therefore unknown in its efficiency. The ulcers of only 25 percent stopped bleeding in this group. In reality neither group took anything but a placebo.

Placebo works through the release of neuron transmitters. This means in effect that it is not the placebo but the thought of the patient taking the placebo that is active agent. In the ulcer study the patient stopped bleeding because of their belief that the drug would work. A belief that a pill will cure headache, relieve pain, lower BP, improve sexual abilities, increase strength and vitality, improve appetite, put on or take off weight or even cure a malignancy can bring about that very result.

Since the same inert pill can lead to divergent responses, this means that the human body is capable of providing bio-chemical responses after the mind has been given appropriate suggestion. The pill itself is just a device. The power that activates the placebo ef-

fect is the power of suggestion alone. This suggestion is thus converted into the body's intention to cure itself therefore why not bypass the deception of sugar pill and go directly to the intention.

The fact that BP is controlled by the autonomous (involuntary) nervous system once convinced doctor that it was beyond conscious control. However three decades of research with bio feedback meditation, hypnosis and other mind-body techniques have shown that mind is capable of taking control of involuntary function.

True health, body will not need to call attention to itself. But if one has headache, back pain, chronic disease, pain, inflammation, it is urging to find and fix the cause. The mind manifests discomfort as pain, nervousness, spasm, inflexibility and trauma, the knots that awareness can undo.

As a nurse we know that health promotion is the process of fostering awareness, influencing attitudes and identifying alternatives so that people can make informed choices and change behaviour to achieve an optimum level of physical and mental health and improve their physical and social environment.

Health promotion has to do with acquiring mental, physical, spiritual assets to protect and buffer people from disease as well as to move them along high level of wellness. Health promotion means more than preventing illness. It means assisting individuals to enhance their health. It focuses on adopting healthy behaviours rather than merely avoiding illness.

As health care professional nurses have responsibility to promote activity that fosters well-being, self actualisation and personal fulfillment. Every interaction with health care consumers must be viewed as an opportunity to promote positive health attitude and behaviour.

Once the appropriate techniques of stress release and insight are learnt, trapped negative emotions, decision and belief are released. It helps to clear up physical health as well as mental and emotional health.