

Chapter 11

NATUROPATHY and HOLISTIC MEDICINE

Naturopathy is not easy to define. The word is not even to be found in my 1973 two-volume Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. It does appear in the 1976 edition of the Concise Oxford English Dictionary where it is defined as “treatment of disease by seeking to assist natural therapy”. That is to say, it utilises “Nature’s cure”.

The origins of naturopathy

Many of the principles espoused by naturopaths were laid down by Hippocrates, the “Father of Medicine” in Greece two and a half thousand years ago. Hippocrates said that good health depends upon the correct balance of rest and exercise, proper nourishment and emotional stability. These same precepts were promulgated by Vincenz Priessnitz (1799-1851), a farmer in Silesia, Germany. He advocated ice-cold baths, fresh air, barefoot walks in grass and streams, and the eating of wholesome food consisting of black bread, vegetables and fresh milk.

These ideas were then expounded by others including Johannes Schroth who combined diet with hydrotherapy. This latter notion of hydrotherapy was popularised by Father Sebastian Kneipp (1821-1897) of Bad Worihösen in Bavaria, Germany who supposedly cured himself of an otherwise fatal lung condition by using herbs and plunging into ice-cold water every day for months. Spas utilising the methods he advanced were established throughout Europe.

This approach was then brought to America by Benedict Lust (1872-1945), a German doctor who migrated to the United States in 1892. He founded the American School of Naturopathy in 1900 in New York City, the first class graduating in 1902. Graduates of schools such as these give themselves the degree of N.D. (doctor of naturopathy). This name, naturopathy, had been proposed by John H Scheel, a German homeopath. It is derived from the Latin word “natura” meaning birth, nature, quality, character and the physical world combined with the Greek word πάθηα (PATHEIA) meaning suffering or disease.

In 1900, a group of practitioners who followed Kneipp’s doctrines decided to encompass within their practice all “natural” methods including hydrotherapy, herbal remedies, homeopathy, nutritional therapy, psychotherapy, massage and manipulation. Many of these ideas were formalised in print by Henry Lindlahr, an American doctor who wrote a book entitled *Philosophy of natural therapeutics* in the early part of this century. He defined health as being “the normal and harmonious vibration of the elements

and forces composing the human entity in the physical, mental and moral planes of being in conformity with the constructive principle in nature". Conversely therefore, disease according to Lindlahr, is the result of inharmonious vibration to nature's laws. He believed that stresses in the body lead to its exhaustion and the devitalisation of its resources.

Words such as these are rather vague and difficult to get to grips with. In more recent times, definitions have become tightened and somewhat sharper. The British Naturopathic and Osteopathic Association defines naturopathy as "a system of treating human ailments which recognises that healing depends upon the vital curative force within the human organism". Likewise, the American Naturopathic Association says that naturopathy is "a therapeutic system ... employing nature's agencies, forces, processes and products". In classical terms, this has been expressed as *medicatrix vis naturae* - the healing power of nature.

The body's innate healing power

Of course, there is nothing new in this idea that the body has an innate capacity to heal itself. Medical practitioners rely on these healing capabilities of the human body all the time. The surgeon physically removes or repairs a diseased part but then waits for the body to complete the healing process by repairing the incisions. Several hundred years ago, the French military surgeon Ambroise Paré (1510-1590) summarised these views in his famous aphorism about wounds: "Je le pansait; Dieu le guarit" (I dressed him and God healed him)

It is not only surgeons that depend upon such processes. The cardiologist supports the patient by pharmacological or if necessary by electrical means while he or she is recovering from a heart attack. An infectious diseases physician prescribes an antibiotic to kill bacteria but counts on the patient's white cells to mop up the invader. A psychiatrist uses a variety of psychological and pharmacological means to try to restore balance to the mind and emotions of a person suffering from a mental illness.

Thus, both orthodox medicine and naturopathy rely on the body's innate tendency to restore itself to a normal balance. This capacity is called homeostasis. The problem is that sometimes the body's defences are overwhelmed and disease results. It is at this point that medicine and naturopathy irreconcilably diverge.

The "whole patient"

Naturopaths love to claim that they consider the whole patient. This is called "holistic" or "wholistic" medicine. In fact, the claim is completely specious as their consideration of the patient is no more than skin deep. Remarkably, advocates of holistic medicine such as chiropractors, iridologists, reflexologists, tongue diagnosticians, zone-therapists and others all

claim to diagnose and treat the whole from some anatomical part. Of course, they differ about which part but that does not seem to bother them. Furthermore, either overtly or implicitly, these practitioners assert that doctors do not look at the whole patient. This is patent nonsense.

Clearly there is tremendous variation among doctors in the degree to which they view a patient in his or her totality. This depends upon their training and their personality but most of all it is regulated by their relationship with the patient. As a rule, a person's general practitioner or family doctor will have the best view of the whole patient, an overview of all their illnesses, and an understanding of their family and social circumstances. You would expect a general practitioner to be able to pick up mild depression in one of his patients but you would not expect him to be able to perform a coronary artery bypass graft. Conversely, you would not condemn a cardiac surgeon for missing mild depression but you would castigate him if performed a bypass operation on a patient with widespread cancer.

Thus, both doctors and naturopaths consider the whole patient. In the case of doctors, the view of the whole patient tends to vary inversely with the practitioner's degree of specialisation. Specialisation indeed is the reverse of the aphorism: "Jack of all trades and master of none". The general practitioner has a broad view, does not have detailed knowledge and skills in narrow areas, but has an enormous contribution to make. The question is: does a naturopath have any contribution to make?

It is not holism that is the problem but the accoutrements that sometimes accompany it. Dr. Arnold Relman, one-time editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, wrote that no-one has any quarrel with the notion that doctors must deal with patients and not just their diseases. But he went on to reject the irrational side of holistic medicine with its mystical cults and the paraphernalia of outlandish sects.¹ Relman is not alone in his views. Clark Glymour PhD and Douglas Stalker PhD from the universities of Pittsburgh and Delaware in the United States believe that holistic medicine is a "deliberate attempt to substitute a mystical for an engineering conception of the physician and an attack on scientific understanding and reasoning."²

Differences between doctors and naturopaths

This brings us to the fundamental consideration as to what differentiates a medical practitioner from a naturopath. Perhaps you accept my view that both groups of practitioners practise holistic medicine in its broad sense and both accept that the body

¹Relman AS. Holistic medicine. *New England Journal of Medicine* 300: 312-213, 1979

²Glymour C, Stalker D. Engineers, cranks, physicians and magicians. *New England Journal of Medicine* 308: 960-964, 1983

has an innate capacity to heal itself and maintain a homeostatic balance. In order to deal with an illness, there are four basic components that need to be addressed:

- what is the cause of the illness?
- what is the pathology, that is, what are the structural (tissue), biochemical or psychological abnormalities?
- can the pathology be diagnosed by the history, examination or various investigations such as blood tests, tissue biopsies and X-rays?
- is there a specific treatment that deals with either the cause or the pathology?

The abilities of doctors and naturopaths to fulfil these requirements is summarised in Table 1. The medical profession is not perfect. In many instances we know the cause. For example, an organism called *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* is the cause of tuberculosis. In other instances, we have some idea but we do not understand the process fully; thus, we know that lung cancer is often related to having been a heavy smoker. With other diseases such as multiple sclerosis we are completely ignorant. In general, we have a pretty good understanding of the pathology. We know what changes are produced in tissues and organs and can recognise the changes when diseased tissues are examined under the microscope. Doctors more often than not are able to diagnose an illness. It may simply be a question of looking in the throat of a patient complaining of a sore throat to diagnose tonsillitis. Diagnosis may depend upon a blood test such as a high blood sugar level indicating diabetes mellitus. At other times, radiological investigations such as CT (computerised tomographic) scan of the brain are helpful. Sometimes, it is necessary to obtain a tissue sample by biopsy and examine it in the laboratory. Often there is an effective specific treatment: antibiotics for pneumonia or an operation for appendicitis, for example. Regrettably, there are still many conditions for which there is no known cure such as Alzheimer's disease or widespread cancer. What about the naturopath?

The naturopaths' view of disease

In contrast to medicine, naturopathy has no scientific basis. Coming to terms with naturopathy's understanding of the causes and nature of disease is rather like shadow boxing. It is constantly changing. Propositions are never tested by naturopaths. An idea is true simply because a naturopath thought of it. Anyone who objects to this approach is dismissed as being bigoted and prejudiced. If this includes me, so be it.

In order to illustrate these points, let us take an example. In recent times it has been popular amongst naturopaths to blame all manner of diseases upon "Candida" (see the last chapter on Miscellaneous therapies). "Candida" is now in danger of being displaced by "Fasciolopsis".

I was somewhat mystified a little while ago to receive a telephone call from a general

practitioner asking me if I knew anything about “Fasciolopsis” causing chronic fatigue syndrome. I said that I thought it rather unlikely but I would check. I reviewed the medical literature by a computerised Medline search, found nothing, and reassured him.

Of course, I was looking in the wrong place. I should have looked in the alternative medicine literature. Shortly thereafter, I was sent a copy of an article³ from a magazine called *Nexus*. The title of this article is “A cause for all cancer?” and was extracted from a book written by a naturopath. The only time any doubt was expressed was in the question mark. The rest of the piece had no reservations. We are told that:

“all cancers are alike. They are all caused by a parasite. A single parasite! It is the human intestinal fluke. And if you kill this parasite, the cancer stops immediately. The tissue becomes normal again. In order to get cancer, you must have this parasite... Its scientific name is *Fasciolopsis buskii*.”

Fasciolopsis buski is a worm. According to the author of this text, cancer develops when this worm gets into the liver of a person who also has propyl alcohol in their body as orthophosphotyrosine is said to be produced and this is supposed to produce cancer. In order to avoid having propyl alcohol in our bodies, we are advised not to use anything with “prop” in the list of ingredients.

Not only does this remarkable parasite cause all sorts of cancers but it seems to cause just about any serious illness known to man! We are further told:

“ . adult flukes in your liver, if you have propyl alcohol in it, cause cancer!
 . adults in your pancreas, if you have wood alcohol in it, cause diabetes!
 . adults in your thymus, if you have benzene in it, cause HIV disease!
 . adults in your brain, if you have toluene or xylene in it, cause Alzheimer’s disease!
 . adults in your kidneys cause Hodgkin’s disease, in your uterus, endometriosis, or in your prostate, chronic prostatitis, if you have other solvents there!
 . adults in your skin, you have Kaposi’s sarcoma.”

But good news! You can prevent all these disasters by getting rid of the worms by taking a combination of three herbal remedies - black walnut hull, wormwood (*Artemisia*) and cloves.

Now it so happens that I am an expert on worms. In fact, I know as much or more about worms that infect people than just about anybody else on this planet. I have written the major text on the history of this subject, *A History of Human Helminthology*.⁴ This book has received extremely laudatory reviews.^{5,6} So I know what I am talking about. The story recounted above about “Fasciolopsis” is pure, unadulterated, patent nonsense. I

³Editor’s extract. *Nexus* October-November 1994, pages 29-32

⁴Grove DI. A history of human helminthology, CAB International, Wallingford, pp 848, 1990

⁵“The publication of this book represents a major landmark in the literature of parasitology. It is a monumental achievement by the author.” GS Nelson, *Journal of Helminthology* 65: 120, 1991

⁶“A splendid achievement, certain to become the the standard text on the history of human helminthology for many years.” L Goodwin, *Nature* 349: 290, 1991

can agree with the author of that article on one point only: *Fasciolopsis buski* is a human intestinal fluke.

Fasciolopsis buski lives in the lumen (the hollow insides) of the bowel and attaches to the lining of the intestine. It never invades the liver, pancreas, brain or any other organ. How do I know? These worms in their various stages are easy to see either with the aid of a microscope in the case of eggs and larvae, or with the naked eye in the case of adult worms. They have never been found in any of these tissues at post-mortem examination or in specimens removed at operation.

Cancers, AIDS, diabetes and so on afflict people living in every continent and country. The authors of this piece of fiction should have done a little more elementary research. *Fasciolopsis buski* does not occur in Europe, Africa, North America, South America or Australia. Many parasites have a limited geographical distribution. This one is no exception. It is found only in Asia, especially in China and Southeast Asia.

Undoubtedly stories such as this could be recounted *ad nauseam*. One can only feel angry about the effrontery of those who have the gall to peddle such pernicious nonsense and sadness for the long-suffering, unsuspecting public on whom it is thrust. These claims have a thin veneer of camouflage and it is easy for the layman, who has no knowledge of these matters to be misled. How then can one know what to accept and what to reject? Look at the credentials of the person making the statements. Is the person a qualified health professional or a practitioner of alternative medicine? When I graduated from medical school over thirty years ago, there were only nine or ten universities in Australia. They were all centres of excellence and you could rely with reasonable confidence upon their graduates as being "safe". Now there are dozens of these institutions in this country. Some of them are a laughing stock. I was appalled recently to see an advertisement in *The Australian* from a so-called university in rural New South Wales for applicants for the position of associate professor of naturopathy. So much for academic standards! Regrettably, you must now enquire not only what qualification does an individual have, but from which institution did he or she acquire it. In the United States, schools of naturopathy have had their ups and downs. Currently, naturopaths are licensed in eight states. There are thought to be about 1,000 naturopaths in the country with most of them living in Oregon and Washington State.⁷

If your informant is a practitioner of alternative medicine, view their information with cynicism and suspicion. If you are in doubt, ask some-one you can trust such as your local family doctor, dentist or pharmacist.

The naturopaths' approach to diagnosis and treatment

⁷Baer HA. The potential rejuvenation of American naturopathy as a consequence of the holistic health movement. *Medical Anthropology* 13: 369-383, 1992

In Table 1, I have made the bald observation that naturopaths have no ability to diagnose disease or provide effective, specific treatment. Why is this so? Not only is this inability the result of an absence of a scientific philosophy of disease, but it flows from the tools and techniques that naturopaths use.

One of the major difficulties in assessing naturopathy is that naturopaths may use one or more disparate techniques and methods. This was well shown when the American Naturopathic Organization was founded in 1919 and billed itself as being an organization “composed of graduates from nature cure, hydrotherapy, diet, chiropractic, osteopathy, mechanotherapy, neuropathy, electropathy, mental and suggestive therapeutics, phototherapy, heliotherapy, phytotherapy and other rational and progressive schools of natural therapy”.⁷

In more recent years, many naturopaths have moved away from the hygienic ideas of the founders of naturopathy and tended to use gimmicks and gadgets and the trappings of pseudomedical technology. Naturopathy has also embraced New Age medicine which holds that in the year 2,000, the earth has passed into the “Age of Aquarius” and this “holistic” era “will be characterized by inner peace, well-being, unity, self-actualisation and the attainment of higher consciousness”.⁷ Thus, a naturopath may use iridology to diagnose a complaint and employ herbal medicine or chiropractic to treat it. Each of these measures has been discussed elsewhere in this book. The evidence for and against each of them has been marshalled. In my view, none is of diagnostic utility. Most are largely worthless therapeutically although some techniques have a small benefit. No alternative therapeutic intervention is dramatically effective or is specifically targeted to the cause or the pathology as are, for example, antibiotics for blood poisoning or a cholecystectomy operation for removal of gall-stones. You must judge for yourself.

If you want to read a sadly poignant story of an encounter with a naturopath, read the description by Gavan O’Connor, a technologist in the pathology department of Princess Margaret Hospital in Perth, Western Australia, whose wife was suffering from terminal malignant melanoma.⁸

Are there any risks with naturopathy?

Clearly by far and away the greatest danger with naturopathy is that a serious illness will not be diagnosed and appropriate therapy will not be instituted. Problems that may flow from the use of alternative therapeutic modalities such as acupuncture or herbal medicine have been described in the chapters devoted to those topics. In addition, other invasive procedures sometimes adopted by naturopaths may occasionally have devastating side-effects.

⁸O’Connor G. Confidence trick. *Medical Journal of Australia* 147: 456-458, 1987

- A 46-year old woman had coffee enemas (coffee injected into the rectum via a tube in the anus) at the rate of one per hour for several days. She then had an epileptic seizure followed by a cardiac arrest. She remained comatose until she died 12 days later. Blood tests on admission showed that her potassium level was dangerously low because of diarrhoea induced by the coffee enemas.⁹
- Between June 1978 and December 1980, 36 patients who had colonic irrigation (enemas) at a chiropractic clinic in Colorado, USA developed amoebiasis. This is a parasitic infection with a protozoon called *Entamoeba histolytica* that affects the bowel. Of the 36 patients who became infected, ten required an operation to remove part of the colon and six patients died.¹⁰
- A 58-year old woman was admitted to the National Institute of Neurology and Neurosurgery in Mexico with pins and needles in her limbs followed by weakness of her legs followed by confusion and coma. She had responded to publicity about the secret of eternal youth offered in a booklet entitled *Towards the Medicine of the Future* that had been written and distributed by a practitioner of holistic medicine. Two weeks before admission she was injected with part of the pituitary gland (also known as the hypophysis) from a pig. She developed an allergic reaction to nervous tissue.¹¹

Conclusions

In my opinion, naturopathy is a fraud. Even Andrew Weil, an author who is generally sympathetic to alternative medicine has his doubts, for he wrote “as the basis of a system of practice ... nature cures do not seem to stand up well in the modern world. Naturopathy is not a strong competitor in the rivalry of available therapies”.¹² Nevertheless, it is quite apparent that naturopaths abound and countless people visit them. What are the explanations for this phenomenon?

First to the naturopaths themselves. How can they peddle the nonsense they do? It is hard to escape the conclusion that they are either deluded or are charlatans. Deluded means that they genuinely believe their misguided ideas. I suspect, however, that many are merely mendacious charlatans. Charlatans are those who pretend for their own profit to

⁹Eisele JW, Reay DT. Deaths related to coffee enemas. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 244: 1608-1609, 1980

¹⁰Istre GR, Kreiss K, Hopkins RS *et al.* An outbreak of amebiasis spread by colonic irrigation at a chiropractic clinic. *New England Journal of Medicine* 307: 339-342, 1982

¹¹Sotelo J, Enriquez RG, Najera R, Zermeno R. Allergic encephalomyelitis associated with holistic medicine (implantation of porcine hypophysis). *The Lancet* ii: 702, 1984

¹²Weil A. *Health and Healing*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, pp 296, 1983

have knowledge and skills that they do not possess. In a word, they are wicked. You have to make up your own mind as to whether I am right or I am wrong.

Why do people consult naturopaths? In general, they are either ignorant (lacking in knowledge), gullible (easily duped), irrational (unable to differentiate sense from nonsense) or desperate. The general public is sadly lacking in accurate scientific and medical information and understanding. This is largely the fault of the media who frequently highlight the sensational, advocate fringe medicine, or simply publish nonsense. There are far too few factual educational articles in the newspapers or magazines, or segments in radio and television programmes. It is the desperate for whom one feels the greatest sympathy. They turn to naturopaths because they have nowhere else to turn. For such patients, the medical profession must be chastised for failing to meet their needs.

I can do no better than leave you with the words of Gavan O'Connor mentioned above. He wrote about the naturopath whom his wife consulted that she was an "ignorant, scheming, conniving charlatan who, with others of her ilk, takes advantage of the gullible and desperate" It was his view that "these parasites that burden the collective body will have to be eliminated". If you are still not convinced and consult a naturopath, then all I can say is *caveat emptor*, for naturopaths live in the make-believe world of Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland":

I f pigs could fly...